

Università di Napoli Federico II - Scuola Superiore Meridionale PhD Programme in Global History
and Governance

***A History of the Sadrist Movement of Iraq
(1991 – 2003): Navigating Tolerated
Opposition and Open Rebellion.***

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Note on the Use of Names and Images.

The people I interviewed who agreed to let me use their names and photos for this work decided to do so only for a dissertation that would not be read by or shared with anybody other than the reviewers and the committee members for the final examination. It is, thus, of the utmost importance that these names and photos are not shared in any other way. Thank you very much for your understanding.

Introduction.

On Friday, February 19, 1999, Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr (Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr) (1943 – 1999),¹ founder and first leader of the Sadrist movement, stepped onto the pulpit of the Great Mosque of Kūfah (Kufa) for the last time. He would be murdered later that evening by the Iraqī Ba‘aṭ (Ba’ath) Regime, along with two of his sons, Muṣṭafā (Mustafa) and Mū‘mal (Mu‘mal), in the streets of Naḡaf (Najaf), in Ḥannānah (Hannane), near his house. By stepping onto that pulpit, he was well aware that he was risking his life, as he had been aware for a while since he had started preaching in Kufa in April 1998. As a sign of his readiness for martyrdom, he started wearing a white shroud (*kafan*) on his shoulders, the one used in the Islamic burial practice, when preaching his Friday sermons. From that place, Imām ‘Alī (Imam Ali), the fourth of the rightly guided caliphs and the first legitimate caliph according to what would later become the Shi’a community, preached. Ali would be assassinated shortly after his crowning as a caliph, beginning, along with the events of Karbalā’ (Karbala) (680), the long journey of the “Religion of Protest” of the Shi’a community.² Imam Mahdī, the twelfth and last of the Shi’a Twelvers Imams, should return to the same mosque, ending *al-Ġayba al-Kubrā* (the Major Occultation).³ From such a place, deeply imbued with meaning, Ṣadr gave his speeches against the inactive and silent clerics in Najaf, against the Ba’ath Regime and its oppression of the Iraqī population, gathering huge crowds. In the beginning, he did so in an allusive way by using metaphors, but then the tone grew stronger and the critics more open, reaching a

¹ In the rest of the text Muhammad al-Sadr or just Sadr.

Names, names of places, book titles, terms, and words in Arabic, in general, will be transliterated at their first occurrence in the text, following the model of Durand, Olivier (2009). *Dialettologia Araba*. Roma: Carocci editore, pp. 29-31. At their first occurrence in the text, next to the transliteration, a simplified transliteration will be provided between brackets, and this will be used in all other occurrences. Book titles and works in Arabic will be transliterated at their first occurrence in the text, and a translation will be provided in brackets. Translation will be used for all other occurrences in the text. Nevertheless, the transliteration for the work’s title will be maintained in the footnotes and final bibliography. All translations, when not specified otherwise, are the author’s. Terms in Arabic will, in general, be in italics. Names of people interviewed will be reported in a simplified translation in the text, and the footnotes; transliteration, and correspondent simplified transliteration will be noted in the “[interviews table](#)” in the Annexes section.

² Dabashi, Hamid (2011). *Shi’ism. A Religion of Protest*, Cambridge (Massachusetts): The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press.

³ al-Musawi, Haider (2023). “Sadr’s Withdrawal and the New Splinter Group of Ashab al-Qadiya”, *Fikra Forum, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/sadrs-withdrawal-and-new-splinter-group-ashab-al-qadiya>) (Last Accessed 02/01/24).

point of no return. As a tribute to his courage, his followers called him the White Lion, referring to his long white beard and the white mantle of the shroud ([See picture n. 1](#)).⁴

These are among the few pieces of information that we have on the Sadrist movement in the 1990s, along with the fact that Sadr had initiated the Friday prayer rituals relying on a grassroots movement that he had somehow built under the repressive and authoritarian Saddam's regime and that he had gathered extensive support from the population of the Iraqi Shi'a, especially the most disadvantaged parts of this community.⁵ These and a few other scarce pieces of information, as we shall see, are what we effectively know about the history of the movement that would go on after the US-led invasion of Iraq and the fall of Saddam's Regime to become one of the most powerful social movements and political actors in Iraq.

Thus, this work wishes to investigate the history of the Sadrist movement in the 1990s, an Iraqi Islamist movement that relied heavily on religious references to frame political and social problems of the contemporary world;⁶ it will look at the historical and socioeconomic conditions of the formation of such movement and its evolving and dynamic nature throughout the decade, investigating its complex and pragmatic relationship with the Iraqi Ba'athist Regime, shifting between tolerated opposition to open rebellion, as stated in the

⁴ Cockburn, Patrick (2008). *Muqtada al-Sadr and the Fall of Iraq*. London: Faber&Faber Limited, p. 78.

⁵ According to the Iraqi sociologist Faleh Abdul-Jabbar, Shi'ism "is neither a sociological nor a political category." Abdul Jabbar, Faleh (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*. London: Saqi Books, p. 266. In this work, we will thus follow this observation by Abdul-Jabbar, even though we will often use the term "Shi'a – Shi'ism – Shi'ite" to refer to different objects. On the one hand, we will use to talk about the Iraqi Shi'a community; even without being a sociological category and considering the many socioeconomic and political differences between people referring to themselves as Shi'a in Iraq, in the second half of the 20th century, they shared specific experiences both economically, socially and politically, as we shall see in the first chapter. Thus, we will see how a certain group that shared specific socioeconomic and political conditions and that also defined themselves as Shi'a became the main group of supporters and recipients of Sadr's discourse. On the other hand, we will also use Shi'a and Shi'ism to refer to a part of the Islamist movement in Iraq and the debates they were influenced by. In this sense, the use of the term Shi'a was to refer to specific historical, intellectual, and political references that people forming this part of the Islamist movement in Iraq had and to the fact that they connected themselves to a specific intellectual and religious tradition that was self-defined as Shi'ism. This being said, we will not use the category "Shi'ism – Shi'a" as a tool to explain social or political phenomena.

⁶ *Islamism is the belief that politics must be subordinated to Islamic norms and values. Islamism thus involves the politicization of religion whereby one set of believers seeks to impose its understanding of religion on society as a whole. It differs from individual piety and devotion, in which belief is confined to the individual and thus has no necessary political implications or consequences.* Davis, Eric (2014). *Islamism, Authoritarianism, and Democracy. A Comparative Study of Egypt and Iraq*. In Jebnoun, Nouredine and Kia, Mehrdad and Kirk, Mimi. *Modern Middle East Authoritarianism. Roots, Ramifications, and Crisis*. New York: Routledge, pp. 199 – 224.

Joe Beinin and Joe Stork use the term 'political Islam' to describe all movements that align their positions and actions based on the Qur'an, the Hadith and other religious texts, and which are 'creatively deploying selected elements of the Islamic tradition, combined with ideas, techniques, institutions, and commodities of the present and recent past to cope with specifically modern predicaments. Beinin, Joel and Stork, Joe (1997). *On the Modernity, Historical Specificity, and International Context of Political Islam*. In Beinin, Joel and Stork, Joe. *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report*. London: IB Tauris & Co, p. 4.

title. The Sadrist movement built upon the network of Muhammad al-Sadr's religious agents (*wukalā'* pl. of *wakīl*) (*wukala'* – *wakil*) and could count on informal and family connections, word-of-mouth mechanisms, forms of informal welfare, and a focus on proselytism, call to Islam (*da'wah*) (*da'wa*) and preaching.

Other than the interest in reconstructing the creation and development of an essential piece of Iraqi contemporary history, still quite understudied, the exploration of the Sadrist movement provides us with a perfect example of the development of an opposition movement, in the form of an Islamist movement, under an authoritarian regime.⁷ The case of the development of an Islamist opposition movement under such a regime also dialogues with the role of Islamist movements and their relationship with authoritarian regimes across the Arab world; this shifting connection has often seen them coexist with authoritarianism as a form of “anti-systemic tolerated opposition” with different functions, and, in other moments, has seen these movements undergo intense campaigns of repression.

According to Albrecht, in his study on opposition in Egypt, the study of opposition movements under authoritarianism in the Middle East is still relatively unexplored, as opposed to the widespread studies on the regimes themselves, or political movements, such as the Islamists, but not seen from the perspective of opposition movements.⁸ The present study does not aim to be a comprehensive study of the opposition in Iraq under Saddam Hussein's rule. However, it draws on the literature on Islamist movements opposing authoritarian regimes to better understand the Sadrist movement's development and, thus, in general, expand our knowledge on opposition in Iraq under Saddam in the 1990s, which is mainly studied in its expressions in exile, outside of Iraq, in that period and mostly ignores the Sadrist movement as an opposition movement.⁹

⁷ There is a broad debate about the totalitarian or authoritarian nature of Saddam's regime. I will follow Joseph Sassoon's definition, which classifies the Iraqi Ba'ath Regime as authoritarian and not totalitarian. Sassoon, Joseph (2012). *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 5 – 9.

⁸ Albrecht, Holger (2013). *Raging Against the Machine. Political Opposition under Authoritarianism in Egypt*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, p. xxiv. Among the studies on opposition to authoritarianism or opposition in general, the focus, in works that are not primarily looking at the Middle East, like Albrecht's, is almost exclusively on parties while not considering that opposition can also take the form of an informal and dynamic movement such as the Sadrist movement. Helms, Ludger (2023). “Political Oppositions in Democratic and Authoritarian Regimes: A State-of-the-Field(s) Review.” *Government and Opposition: An International Journal of Comparative Politics*, Vol. 58, pp. 391–414.

⁹ Al-Bayati, Hamid (2011). *From Dictatorship to Democracy*. University of Pennsylvania Press. Katzman, Kenneth (2000). *Iraq's Opposition Movement*. CRS Report for Congress. Rabil, Robert G. (2002). *The Iraqi Opposition Evolution: From Conflict to Unity?* Middle East Review of International Affairs, Vol. 6, No. 4. Chalabi, Ahmed (1994). *Opposing Saddam Hussein*. The Brown Journal of Foreign Affairs, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 119-130. Opposition outside Iraq has gathered more scholarly attention, also thanks to the very vocal calls for the toppling of Saddam's Regime by this very same opposition. This opposition, especially in the US and

Islamism as Tolerated Opposition in the Middle East.

According to the French historian Francois Burgat, the return to an Islamist discourse that accompanied the rise of Islamist movements and the spread of Islamists through a surge of politicized religiosity in the second half of the XXth century all over the Middle East is a continuation of the process of decolonization of the region; initially, the decolonization discourse was spread through a Marxist or a nationalist language and, later on, it muted into an Islamist discourse, that emerged as the result of geopolitical shifts, as we shall see, but also as this discourse was perceived as endogenous and tied to an inherited culture and opposed to the Westernization that, according to the Islamists, was confused by the Arab post-independence governments with modernization.¹⁰ This process, which slowly began in the first half of the 20th century – Burgat set its beginning in 1928 with the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt – will see its fruits much later, in the 1980s and the 1990s.¹¹

Burgat divides this long process into three phases: the first goes from the beginning of European colonization in the Arab world to the independence of Arab countries; the second from the independences to the fall of the USSR; and the third from that moment on. During the second phase of this process, Islamist discourse and the rise of Islamism focused on fighting, as we said, local elites seen as too Westernized; this fight gained momentum after the defeat of Arab nationalism and Pan-Arabism in 1967,¹² along with the failure of these regimes to bring the promised economic welfare.¹³ Islamism started to gain terrain as the

Europe, has lobbied with those who later would guide the US-led invasion of Iraq. Thanks to this kind of visibility and the difficulties of studying opposition inside Iraq, these kinds of in-exile opponents gained more academic attention. Alshaibi, Wisam H. (2024). “The Anatomy of Regime Change: Transnational Political Opposition and Domestic Foreign Policy Elites in the Making of US Foreign Policy on Iraq.” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 130, No. 3, pp. 539 – 594.

¹⁰ Burgat, Francois and Dowel, William (1993). *The Islamic Movement in North Africa*. Austin: University of Texas Press. Burgat Francois (2020). *Understanding Political Islam*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 2 – 5.

¹¹ Gürel, Burak (2015). *Islamism: A Comparative Historical Overview*. In Balkan, Neşecan, and Balkan, Erol and Öncü, Ahmet. *The Neoliberal Landscape and the Rise of Islamist Capital in Turkey*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2015, pp. 13-40, p. 13. *A series of significant political developments have kept Islamism in the headlines during the 1980s and 1990s, such as the Iranian Revolution (1979), the war between the Soviet Union and the Afghan mujahideen (1979–89), the emergence of Hezbollah in Lebanon (1982) and Hamas in Palestine (1987), the Algerian Civil War (1992–97), and the Taliban’s takeover in Afghanistan (1996).*

¹² Campanini, Massimo (2006). *Storia del Medio Oriente Contemporaneo*. Bologna: Il Mulino, pp. 156, 168. Abu-Rabi’, Ibrahim M. (2004). *Contemporary Arab Thought. Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History*. London: Pluto Press, p. 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21. *Growing mass disillusionment was due not only to economic failure but also to the awareness of a rising capitalist class well connected with the so-called socialist regimes.* Soherwordi, Syed Hussain Shaheed (2013). *Political Islam: A Rising Force in the Middle East*. Pakistan Horizon, Vol. 66, No. 4, pp. 21-37, pp 27 – 30.

Arab nationalists were losing it.¹⁴ Along with the Islamists, the decline of the Nationalist and Pan-Arabist movements also benefited the extreme left.¹⁵ Even before that moment, Pan-Arabist leaders used Islamic references in their discourse, recognizing the importance of these references and the participation of this discourse in the decolonization discourse. However, after the symbolic date of 1967, the use of Islamic references in political discourse started to increase, reaching a new level through the 1980s, with the impactful event of the 1979 Iranian revolution and the events of the 1990s, such as the Algerian civil war (1992 – 1997) or the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan (1996), entering the third phase outlined by Burgat.

The rise of Islamist discourse and Islamist movements was also fuelled by a movement from below, mainly driven by the urbanization of the population in the Arab countries, their dissatisfaction with the socioeconomic possibilities promised by the post-independence regimes and never realized, even for university-educated people, along with the other geopolitical causes already highlighted. The Islamist movements offered an ideological and socioeconomic alternative, providing welfare services when the regimes could not.¹⁶

Throughout the period of transition between the end of the 1960s to the 1990s, regimes in the Arab world inadvertently also helped the growing popularity of Islamist groups and discourse by using them to undermine the extreme left that had also benefited from the 1967 defeat, especially the Communist parties, to the left of the Arab nationalist governments.¹⁷ The Islamists, on their part, deployed rhetoric debating socioeconomic issues, with a critical point of view very similar to that of the left,¹⁸ exactly to challenge and occupy leftists' political space, an objective they reached and after which most references to socioeconomic justice became secondary issues.¹⁹ This use of Islamist movements by regimes in the region alternated with repression cycles throughout the second half of the XXth century.

¹⁴ Wickham, Carry Rosefsky (2002). *Mobilizing Islam. Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 205.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁶ Soherwordi, Syed Hussain Shaheed (2013). *Political Islam: A Rising Force in the Middle East*. Pakistan Horizon, Vol. 66, No. 4, pp. 21-37, pp 27 – 30.

¹⁷ Shehata, Dina (2010). *Islamists and Secularists in Egypt. Opposition, Conflict, and Cooperation*. New York: Routledge, p.54. *During the 1970s and 1980s, the regime tolerated, and even encouraged, the growth of the Brotherhood, seeing it as constituting a counterweight to leftist and militant Islamist forces in the opposition*. Albrecht, Holger (2013). *Raging Against the Machine. Political Opposition under Authoritarianism in Egypt*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, p. 98. The US also used the Islamists with the same goal of fighting Communism from the 1960s to the 1980s. Soherwordi, (2013). *Political Islam*, p. 27. Ibrahim, Saad Eddin (1996). *Egypt, Islam, and Democracy*. Cairo: the American University in Cairo Press, p. 36.

¹⁸ Ibrahim (1996). *Egypt, Islam, and Democracy*, pp. 40, 41.

¹⁹ Ben Salem, Maryam (2020). "God loves the rich." The Economic Policy of Ennahda: Liberalism in the Service of Social Solidarity". *Politics and Religion*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 695 – 718, p. 699.

This play ended with the progressive loss of power of the left in the Arab world and, thus, the end of the leftist threat, culminating in the USSR's collapse, but already well underway at the beginning of the 1980s. This collapse also sealed the end of the influence of the Pan-Arabic and Arab nationalist discourse, forcing the Regimes to shift more toward a discourse with an increasing presence of religious references, as we shall see clearly in the case of Iraq and, thus, gave even more power to the Islamist groups than before. These groups continued to be repressed, but they had a growing influence on society, and their discourse with religious references had reached such an extensive influence that even the regimes repressing them had to adapt to it.

Research Questions and Approach.

The fact that Islamist groups were used to undermine the left, in particular the Communists, as we have seen, brought these groups to be considered by regimes throughout the Arab world as “anti-systemic-tolerated opposition.”²⁰ The definition of “anti-systemic-tolerated opposition” is not only a response to the use of Islamist groups as a counter-leftist instrument but also an answer to the broader questions asked by Holger Albrecht in his work on opposition in Egypt: *Why does political opposition—in different forms of organizations and exhibiting different levels of organizational coherence and popular support—exist over a protracted period of time in an authoritarian regime? And why does the opposition not necessarily contribute to the fall of an authoritarian regime?*²¹ These questions can be beneficial in reconstructing the history of the Sadrist movement in Iraq.

In his work on Egyptian opposition, Albrecht points out how the regime allowed a certain measure of opposition for different reasons. He theorizes the existence of three kinds of opposition groups: integrated dissent (institutions that have been incorporated as pillars of the state in contrast to institutions that initially drove the establishment of the same regime), tolerated opposition (political groups outside the government whose emergence have been formally recognized and tolerated from the regime); and anti-systemic opposition

²⁰ Albrecht (2013). *Raging Against the Machine*, pp. xxiii, 11. The definition of “anti-systemic tolerated opposition” includes different ideas. Anti-systemic opposition is defined by the fact that it proposes an alternative to the existing regime regarding ideology and has an alternative project to reorganize society. They formed a counterhegemonic force to the regimes, providing a definition close to the perspective provided by Asef Bayat of a movement trying to propose *alternative values and institutions* to change society, a definition we will use to explore the Sadrist movement.

²¹ Ibid., p. xvii.

(groups that play by the political rules and within the political system but question the latter's core, thus, an opposition of principle).²² The regime tolerated these kinds of opposition,²³ for lack of strength to repress them or for fear of consequences of the repression, or because they played certain functions, such as helping the regime against opponents or enemies, stabilizing and legitimizing the regime – when this was liberalized, – or even playing a rent-seeking function, helping the regime secure funds from abroad.

The Iraqi and Sadrist case, as we shall see, is different, and thus, it is even more interesting to provide an example of the creation of an opposition movement under an authoritarian regime.

The Iraqi Regime was not liberalized, at least politically, and did not admit opposition. The Sadrist movement was an exception, and it could be, as, for most of the 1990s, it did not almost carry out any open activity as an opposition movement. Thus, it was tolerated as a social and religious, and only as a very veiled and indirect opposition movement, and also as it conducted activities beneficial to the Regime's interests. At the same time, the movement managed to build, almost unseen, a network and spread ideas that, in the end, would play against the Iraqi Regime, bringing out the oppositional aspect of Sadrism. Ultimately, the open-rebellion phase played out only after the late Summer of 1998, when the movement was almost forced into an open confrontation with the Ba'ath Regime.

This trajectory and particular situation escapes all the abovementioned categories, thus providing another, and new, example of opposition under an authoritarian regime. Indeed, it was not integrated dissent. It was not tolerated opposition because the Regime did not formally recognize and tolerate it. Finally, it was more similar to anti-systemic opposition. However, despite proposing a radical alternative to the existing Regime, Sadrism did not play by the political rules and within the political system, as we shall see. Yet, it was, for some time, tolerated because it played certain functions, beneficial to the Iraqi Regime.

Probably the best way to describe this complex and shifting relationship²⁴ when we look at Sadrism as a tolerated-opposition movement is to use Zartman's definition where the

²² Ibid., pp. 381 – 388.

²³ Albrecht, Holger (2005). "How can opposition support authoritarianism? Lessons from Egypt." *Democratization*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 378-397, p. 379.

²⁴ Heibach and Transfeld explore the fundamental dynamic character of opposition in the Middle Eastern context in their work on opposition in Yemen under authoritarianism. Heibach, Jens and Transfeld, Mareike (2017). "Opposition dynamism under authoritarianism: the case of Yemen, 1994–2011." *Democratization*, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 597 – 613.

Regime and the opposition create a situation where *[n]either uses the other, but each serves the other's interests in performing its own role.*²⁵

Looking at the history of the Sadrist movement is particularly fruitful as it allows us to understand how Sadr and his followers could create and develop such a movement in Iraq in the 1990s. Furthermore, it will enable us to see that all aspects mainly investigated by works on Sadrism, such as the millenarian spirit, the Friday sermons, and the widespread popular support – which are still to be considered central and will be, of course, analyzed in-depth in this work – are phenomena made possible only by the peculiar status Sadr and the movement enjoyed in Iraq in the 1990s and the conditions, both national and regional, that allowed this specific situation, and by the way Sadr and his followers worked within this situation. As pointed out by Peter Harling and Pierre-Jean Luizard, the Sadrist phenomenon is polysemic, and thus, keeping together all the different aspects that are part of the development of this movement is extremely difficult; we decided to try to do so by first focusing on the structural conditions that made the emergence of this movement possible and, then, by looking at the structure of the movement, the millenarist, class and innovative elements highlighted by Harling.²⁶

In this sense, this research will try, on the one hand, to deromanticize the vision of Sadrism only as an opposition movement, devoted to fight heroically against the Ba'ath Regime,²⁷ giving a more nuanced approach and following Mauriello's suggestion that the hawza politics *should be explained through the prism of power, social prominence and pragmatism, and not law and ideology.*²⁸ On the other hand, we will try to problematize Sadrism in its relationship with the Ba'ath Regime, exploring precisely what happened and in which way Sadrism benefited from the Ba'ath Party and the other way around, dispelling the simplistic theory that Sadr had a direct and close collaboration with the Ba'ath.²⁹

²⁵ Zartman, I. William (1988). *Opposition as Support of the State*. In Dawisha, Adeed, and Zartman, I. William. *Beyond Coercion: The Durability of the Arab State*. London: Croom Helm, p. 62.

²⁶ Harling, Peter (2007). *The Sadrist Trend: Class Struggle, Millenarism, and Fitna* (<https://peterharling.com/2007/06/01/the-sadrist-trend-class-struggle-millenarism-and-fitna/>).

²⁷ Albrecht (2013). *Raging Against the Machine*, p. xxiii. Kadhim, Abbas (2013), *The Hawza Under Siege: a Study in the Ba'ath Party Archive*. Boston University, Institute for Iraqi Studies Occasional Paper, No. 1, p. 55.

²⁸ Mauriello, Raffaele (2011). *Descendants of the Family of the Prophet in Contemporary History: A Case Study, The Šī'ī Religious Establishment of al-Nağaf (Iraq)*. Roma: Fabrizio Serra Editore, p. 21.

²⁹ Baram, Amatzia (2010), *Sadr the Father, Sadr the Son, the "Revolution in Shi'ism," and the Struggle for Power in the Hawzah of Najaf*, in Baram, Amatzia and Rohde, Achim, and Zeidel, Ronen. *Iraq Between Occupations: Perspectives from 1920 to the Present*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 143-157, p. 144. Machlis, Elisheva (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State: the Ethno-Religious Dimension." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, p. 6. Mervin, Sabrina and Mouline, Nabil (2017). *Islam politiques: Courants, doctrines et idéologies*. Paris: CNRS édition, p. 148. Furthermore, all these works support the fact

In the general framework provided by this approach, the research will try to situate the Sadrist Movement within the history of the Middle East and Iraq, the history of the Shi'a Islamist movement in the country, and the debates within Shi'ism, thus looking at a broad picture both geographically and temporally. In the same framework, we will also look at the specific, almost microhistorical context of the *micromechanisms* of the construction of the Sadrist movement.³⁰ Within this construction, the research will look at how the movement built, using Asef Bayat's terminology, *alternative values*, and *institutions*.³¹ In this sense, we will try to look at the Sadrist movement following Bayat's approach that states that a social movement, before trying to reach political power, needs to "conquer" society – drawing on Gramsci's concept of hegemony – through the construction of *alternative values* and *institutions* that can substitute those of the system in place. As we shall see, this description fits the process of construction of the Sadrist movement very well. Also, it fits Sadr's *minimum degree of mutual acceptance* of the Regime, described by the aforementioned approach to opposition movements, implying that Sadrists did not look immediately for a clash with the Ba'ath but chose first to spread his movement in society by working alongside Regime's interests.³²

As we highlighted before, the conditions for the creation of Sadrism are of the utmost importance in this study; nevertheless, it is also central to look at how Sadr and his followers worked within this situation to create their movement and try to "conquer" Iraqi society. To do so, we shall also look at the process of interpretation made by Sadr and his followers to understand the conditions they were living in and how to exploit them to their advantage. This process is defined as *interpretative work* by the studies on social movement and can help us understand the choices and the growth of social movements.³³

In this sense, following this theoretical framework, the detailed study of the movement's history, apart from being necessary for reconstructing a part of Iraqi history,

that there was close cooperation between Sadr and the Iraqi Regime without providing any source on which to base their claims.

³⁰ Wickham (2002). *Mobilizing Islam*, pp. 150, 207.

³¹ Bayat, Asef (2007), *Making Islam Democratic. Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 18, 19.

³² Albrecht (2013). *Raging Against the Machine*, p. 35.

³³ Beinin, Joel and Vairel Frédéric (2013), *Introduction: The Middle East and North Africa Beyond Classical Social Movement Theory*, in Beinin, Joel and Vairel Frédéric (ed. by), *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Jasper, James M., and Volpi, Frédéric (2018), *Introduction: Rethinking Mobilization after the Arab Uprisings*. In Jasper, James M., and Volpi, Frédéric (ed. by), *Microfoundations of the Arab Uprisings: Mapping Interactions between Regimes and Protesters*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

also serves to understand how Sadrism spread its *interpretation* of reality, the fruit of its *interpretative work*, and to spread its *alternative values*. The movement's structure and development is the network used to spread these ideas, without which the *alternative values* and *interpretations* of reality would have remained in Sadr's books and among a small group of students and followers. It is, instead, thanks to the Sadrist network, in which we can see the *alternative institutions* described by Bayat, that they could spread throughout Iraq and change Iraqi society.

Literature on Sadrism.

As we pointed out, the history of the Sadrist movement in the 1990s has been rarely studied. Most of the studies on Sadrism focus on the post-2003 movement. It is indeed only after 2003, with the US-led invasion of Iraq, that a more substantial interest in Shi'a movements and history in the country arose.³⁴ With the fall of the Ba'ath Regime and the rise of what the US-led coalition saw as Shi'a forces in Iraq,³⁵ divided among collaborators taking part in forming the new government and various forms of opposition to the occupation, there was a new need for knowledge about the history and the political positions of Iraqi Shi'as. This interest was, of course, dictated by the political circumstances and, thus, was aimed at an instrumental form of knowledge on the Iraqi Shi'as, providing information connected and valuable to the immediate political goal of governing occupied Iraq. Therefore, the works produced in the wake of this new interest primarily focus on the military capacity of the armed opposition, the political goals or interests of Shi'a political actors, and the goals of those aligned with the coalition. There are, of course, notable exceptions. Even if produced in the wake of this new interest, some works fall outside these general lines, providing a deeper understanding of the Shi'a community in Iraq, its history, complexity, and stratification.³⁶ The knowledge production on the Iraqi Shi'a community is a perfect example of how studies on the Middle East are still much interconnected with political interests, recalling the long-opened debate about Orientalism in the research on the

³⁴ This rise in the interest in the study of Shi'ism can be paragonated only to the increase in interest after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which nevertheless saw its focus point toward Iran more than anything else. Here, we find a renewed interest in Shi'ism with an Iraqi focus.

³⁵ Nakash, Yitzhak (2006). *Reaching for Power: The Shi'i in the Modern Arab World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

³⁶ Abdul (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*. Abdul Jabbar, Faleh (2003). *Clerics, Tribes, Ideologues and Urban Dwellers in the South of Iraq: the Potential for Rebellion*. The Adelphi Papers, Vol. 43, No. 354, pp. 161 – 178. Nakash, Yitzhak (1994). *The Shi'is of Iraq*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Middle East and the much-quoted work of Edward Sa'id.³⁷ The Sadrist Movement provides a perfect example of this kind of knowledge production on Iraqi Shi'ism. Most of the works on Sadrism were written after the 2003 invasion. Most of them also mainly investigated the military capacities of Sadrism and the threat it could pose to institutions in Iraq, often relegating the ideology of the trend and the profound social and historical roots of such a movement to brief and vague analysis.³⁸ The short accounts of the movement's history are constructed mainly from secondary sources, and no new information is provided. Of course, a few notable exceptions are also found among these works.³⁹

However, we find some general works investigating the history of the Islamist or Shi'a Islamist movements in Iraq, which quickly mentions Sadrism and hints at the history of this

³⁷ Said, Edward (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.

³⁸ Bayless, Leslie (2012), *Who is Muqtada al-Sadr*, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, N. 35, pp.135-155. Plebani, Andrea (2014), *Muqtada al-Sadr and his February Declarations. Political Disengagement or Simple Repositioning?* ISPI Analysis No. 244. Cordesman, Anthony and Ramos, Jose (2008), *Sadr and the Mahdi Army: Evolution, Capabilities, and a New Direction*. Washington: Centre for Strategic & International Studies. Cochrane, Marisa (2009), *The Fragmentation of the Sadrist Movement*, Washington: The Institute for the Study of War. Bruno, Greg (16/05/2008), *Muqtada al-Sadr*. Council on Foreign Relations: Background, (<https://www.cfr.org/background/muqtada-al-sadr>), (Retrieved 20/09/2021). Mansour, Renad and Van Den Toorn, Christine (2018), *The 2018 Iraqi Federal Elections. A Population in Transition?* LSE Middle East Centre Report. Mansour, Renad (12/02/2020), *After the latest turn, Is Muqtada al-Sadr Losing Influence in Iraq?* Chatham House. Abedin, Mahan (07/2003), *The Sadrist Movement*. Middle East Intelligence Bulletin, Vol. 5, No. 7, (https://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0307_iraqd.htm#_ftn3), (Retrieved 17/09/2021). Murphy, Dan (27/04/2004), *Sadr the agitator: like father, like son*. The Christian Science Monitor (<https://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0427/p01s03-woiq.html>), (Retrieved 24/09/2021). Hubbard, Andrew (2007), *Plague and Paradox: Militias in Iraq*. Small Wars & Insurgencies, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 345-362. Marston, Daniel and Malkasian, Carter (ed. by) (2008), *Counterinsurgencies in Modern Warfare*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing. Patten, David A. (Summer 2007), *Is Iraq in a Civil War?* Middle East Quarterly Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 27-32. Schlichte, Klaus and Schneekener, Ulrich (2015), *Armed Groups and the Politics of Legitimacy*. Civil Wars, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 409-424. Thruber, Ches (2014), *Militias as socio-political movements: Lessons from Iraq's armed Shia groups*. Small Wars and Insurgencies, Vol. 25, No. 5-6, pp. 900-923. Rahimi, Babak (27/07/2009), *The Rise of Ayatollah Moqtada al-Sadr*. Foreign Policy: Dispatch, (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/07/27/the-rise-of-ayatollah-moqtada-al-sadr/>), (Retrieved 02/10/2021). Seymour, Richard (2008), *The Sadrist Revolt and the Sign of God*. Unpublished. Costel, Steven J. (2008), *Surging Out of Iraq?* New York: Nova Science Pub Inc. Alaaldin, Ranj (2014), *Elections in Iraq: What Does the Future Hold?* Insight Turkey, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 53-60. Katzman, Kenneth (25/09/2008), *Iraq: Politics, Elections, and Benchmarks*. CRS Report for Congress. Luizard, Pierre-Jean (2013), *Les Organizations Combattantes Irrégulières des Chiïtes d'Irak*. Institut de Stratégie Comparée, No. 103, pp. 93-118. Krohley, Nicholas (2015), *The Death of the Mehdi Army: The Rise, Fall, and Revival of Iraq's Most Powerful Militia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Godwin, Matthew J. (2012), *Political Inclusion in Unstable Contexts: Muqtada al-Sadr and Iraq's Sadrist Movement*. Contemporary Arab Affairs, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 448-456. Judd, David (2006), *Sadrism, Nationalism and Islamism*. Unpublished article. Cockburn, Patrick (2008), *Muqtada al-Sadr and the Fall of Iraq*. London: Faber&Faber Limited.

³⁹ Abood, Aqeel (2013), *The Sadrist Movement: Success in Mobilizing People in Iraq*. Kufa Review, N. 2, I. 2, p. 2. Mansour, Renad and Clark, Michael David (2014), *Rethinking Sadr: From Firebrand to Iraqi Statesman?* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Robin-D'Cruz (2019), *Social Brokers and Leftist-Sadrist Cooperation in Iraq's Reform Protest Movement*. Robin-D'Cruz, Benedict and Mansour, Renad (2020), *Making Sense of the Sadrist: Fragmentation and Unstable Politics*. Foreign Policy Research Institute – Middle East Program.

movement in the 1990s. The same happens for research work on the contemporary history of Iraq or some of its specific aspects.

In the first group, we can mention Faleh Abdul-Jabbar's *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq*, Yitzhak Nakash's *Reaching for Power*, Sabrina Mervin's *Islam politiques*, David Patel's *Order Out of Chaos*, and Juan Cole's *The United States and Shi'ite Religious Factions in Post-Ba'thist Iraq*.⁴⁰

In the second group, instead, we can remember some relevant works, such as Lisa Blaydes' *State of Repression*, Samuel Helfont's *Compulsion in Religion*, Charles Tripp's *A History of Iraq*, Adeed Dawisha *Iraq: a Political History from Independence to Occupation*, and an article from Keiko Sakai.⁴¹

Nevertheless, we find some works also produced after this renewed interest, explicitly focusing on the Sadrism movement in the 1990s. Among them, we can mention Amatzia Baram *Sadr the Father, Sadr the Son*, Abbas Kadhimi, *The Hawza Under Siege*, Peter Harling, *The Sadrism Trend*, Harith Hasan *The Social Roots of the Sadrism Movement*, Dai Yamao *An Islamist Social Movement under the Authoritarian Regime in Iraq during the 90s* and 'Ādil Ra'uf's (Adil Raouf) *Muḥammad Muḥammad Sādiq al-Ṣadr: Marḡa'iyah al-Maydān*.⁴²

⁴⁰ Faleh (2003), *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq*. Nakash (2006), *Reaching for Power*. Mervin and Mouline (2017), *Islam politiques*. Patel, David Siddhartha (2022). *Order Out of Chaos: Islam, Information, and the Rise and Fall of Social Orders in Iraq*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Cole, Juan (2023). "The United States and Shi'ite Religious Factions in Post-Ba'thist Iraq." *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 4, pp. 543 – 566. Academic interest in Shi'a Islamism saw an increase for obvious reasons after the 1979 Iranian revolution. Still, it remained primarily focused on Iran, thus explaining a certain backlog in the study of Iraqi Shi'a Islamism. Corroborating the idea of a general lack of scholarship on the Shi'a political movement, 2019 the University of Aarhus launched a project to explore this field of study. It was significantly called *Bringing in the Other Islamists - comparing Arab Shia and Sunni Islamism(s) in a sectarianized Middle East*. The project description states: *Research on Islamism has remained predominantly Sunni-centric. This project brings 'the Other Islamists' – Shia Islamists – into the debate on Islamism in the Arab Middle East.* (<https://ps.au.dk/en/research/research-projects/toi>).

⁴¹ Blaydes, Lisa (2018), *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Helfont, Samuel (2018), *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussayn, Islam and the Roots of Insurgencies in Iraq*. New York: Oxford University Press. Tripp, Charles (2007). *A History of Iraq*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Dawisha, Adeed (2009). *Iraq. A Political History from Independence to Occupation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Sakai, Keiko (2003). *The 1991 Intifada in Iraq: Seen through Analyses of the Discourses of Iraqi Intellectuals*. In Keiko, Sakai (ed. by). *Social Protest and Nation-Building, in the Middle East and Central Asia*. Institute of Developing Economies. Japan External Trade Organisation, pp. 157 – 172. Ra'uf, 'Ādil (1999). *Muḥammad Muḥammad Sādiq al-Ṣadr: Marḡa'iyah al-Maydān. Mašru' al-Taḡayyir wa waqā'i' al-Iḡtiyāl* (Muḥammad Muḥammad Sādiq al-Ṣadr: The Square Marḡa'iyah. The Project of Change and the Reality of his Assassination). Dimašq, al-Markaz al-'Irāqī lal-'Ilām wa-l-Dirāsāt.

⁴² Baram (2010), *Sadr the Father, Sadr the Son*. Kadhimi (2013), *The Hawza Under Siege*. Harling (2007). *The Sadrism Trend*. Yamao, Dai (2009). *An Islamist Social Movement under the Authoritarian Regime in Iraq during the 90s: A Study of Sadiq al-Sadr's Leadership and its socio-political Base*. AJAMES (Japan Association for Middle Eastern Studies), No. 25, Issue 1, pp. 18, 19. Hasan, Harith (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrism Movement*:

These works provide helpful information regarding the Sadrist Movement's history in the '90 and Muhammad al-Sadr's life. Nevertheless, there are still many missing parts from this picture, both in retracing the history of Sadrism, which still has many obscure periods, and exploring Sadr's ideas. These works, while providing much valuable information and, in particular, helpful lenses through which to read the Sadrist movement's history, do not go into the detailed reconstruction of the movement's history, ignoring, for the most part, the "how" of the birth, construction, and expansion of Sadrism. Also, there is a gap concerning the period 1991 – 1996 of the movement's history, while most works on Sadrism in the 1990s only focus on the period of the Friday Prayers (1997 – 1999). The lack of knowledge on the 1991 – 1996 period does not allow us to properly analyze the last period of the movement's history in the 1990s, and it is probably due to the difficulties in gathering sources to study this period. While the lack of knowledge of the detailed mechanisms of the Sadrist movement throughout the 1990s also limits our understanding of the movement in general. Furthermore, apart from Adil Rouf's, these works do not try to reconnect Sadrism with the larger historical picture of the Shi'a Islamist movement in Iraq and the debates of Shi'ism in general. Even more, there is no attempt to reconnect Sadrism with the rise of Islamist movements in the Middle East and with the historical events of previous decades, such as the 1980s War with Iran and the like.

Another critical source on Sadrist history, often overlooked by works on the topic, is secondary literature in Arabic. The main works we could retrieve and analyze are those by al-Ṭā'ī (al-Ta'i), al-Simrī (al-Simri), al-Ya'cūbī (al-Ya'cubi), al-Ḥalfī (al-Halfi), and al-Asadī (al-Asadi).⁴³ These works give accounts of al-Sadr's life and political activities, referencing his ideas. Nevertheless, they do not provide an analytical description of Sadr's

Muhammad al-Sadr, Religious Authority and Sociopolitical Practice. The Middle East Journal, Volume 75, Number 3, pp. 365-385.

⁴³ al-Ṭā'ī, Ṣāliḥ (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr fī Tārīḥ al-'Irāq al-Mu'āṣir (1991 – 1999)* (The Political Role of the Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr in the Contemporary History of Iraq, 1991 – 1999). Ahl al-Bayt Journal, Vol. 1, Issue 20, pp. 493 – 532. al-Simrī, Iḥsān (2019) *Dawr al-Marḡa'īyyah al-Fā'ilah fī al-Taṭawur al-Siyāsī wa al-Iḡtimā'ī lal-muḡtam'a al-'Irāqī wa Banā' Ṣaḡsiyyah al-Fard al-'Irāqī: al-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr Anmūḍaḡan* (The Role of the Active Marja'īyyah in the Political and Social Development of Iraqi Society and the Construction of the Iraqi Individual Character: The Model of Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr). Kufa Studies Center Journal, Vol. 2, Issue 61, pp. 30 – 102. Al-Ya'cūbī Muḥammad (2007). *al-Ṣahīd al-Ṣadr al-Tānī kamā A'rifuḥu* (The Second Sadr Martyr as I Knew Him). Bayrūt: Dār al-Mutaqīn lal-Ṭaqāfah wa-l-'Ulūm wa-l-Ṭabā'ah. Al-Ḥalfī, 'Abd al-Nabī (2018). *Qiyām Ṣalāḥ al-Ḡuma'ah fī al-'Irāq fī 'Aḥad al-Marḡa'a al-Dīnī Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr (1997 – 1999)* (The Implementation of the Friday Prayer in Iraq as the Legacy of Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr). Markaz 'Ain lal-Dirāsāt wa-l-Buḥūṭ al-Mu'āṣirah. al-Asadī, Muḥtār (2017). *al-Ṣadr al-Tānī. al-Ṣahīd al-Ṣahīd. Al-Zāharah wardūd al-Fa'il* (The Second Sadr. The Witness and the Martyr. The Phenomenon and the Active Responses). Bayrūt: Dār al-Saḡḡād.

thought and works but only fragmented references to some of his ideas.⁴⁴ This literature, while often considered strongly aligned with the movement, and in some cases, as for the biographies of Sadr, even hagiographic, contains much essential information.⁴⁵ This research

⁴⁴ al-Nağğār, Hānī Ġawād Kāzim (2018). *Al-Mašrū' al-Siyāsī wa al-Iğtimā'ī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Šādiq al-Šadr fi al-'Irāq min Sanah 1991 – 1999 m.* (The Political and Social Project of Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr in Iraq from 1991 to 1999). Nağaf: Markaz 'Ain lal-Dirāsāt wa al-Buḥūt al-Mu'ādirah. Al-Ḥaḍāl, Amğad Hāmid (2012). *Al-Fikr al-Siyāsī 'ind al-Šahīd Muḥammad Muḥammad Šādiq al-Šadr* (The Political Thought of the Martyr Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr). Bayrūt: Mu'assasah al-Balāğ lal-Ṭabā'ah wa al-Našr wa al-Tawzī'. Al-Ka'abī, Qāsim (2008). *Al-Ṭawrah al-Bayḍā'. Dirāsāt fi al-Ḥarakah al-Tağayyiriyyah wa al-Ġihādiyyah wa al-Maydāniyyah la-Sīrah Faqīh al-'Ašr al-Sayyid al-Šahīd Muḥammad al-Šadr* (The White Revolution. Studies on the Project of Change, of Jihad and Civil Society of the Jurist of the Era the Martyr Sayyid Muhammad al-Sadr). Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Taḥaṣṣuṣiyyah fi Fikr al-Sayyid al-Šahīd Muḥammad Muḥammad Šādiq al-Šadr. al-Šadr, Muqtadā (2023). *Ḥayāh al-Sayyid al-Walīd. al-Marğ'a al-Ā'lā wa al-Walī al-'Arīf al-Šahīd al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Šadr* (The Life of the Sayyid Father. The Major Source of Religious Emulation and Guardian of the Knower the Martyr al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Sadr). Nağaf: Haya'ah Turāt al-Šahīd al-Sa'id al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Šadr. 'Anūz, Šalāh (2015). *Al-Hirak al-Siyāsī lal-Tayyār al-Šadrī fi Tarīḥ al-'Irāq al-Mu'āšir wa Dawruhu fi al-'Amaliyyah al-Siyāsiyyah al-'Irāqīyyah (2003 – 2011).* (The Political Movement of The Sadrist Trend in the History of Contemporary Iraq and its Role in the Iraqi Political Action (2003 – 2011). Bayrūt: Ġīkūr lal-Ṭabā'ah wa al-Našr wa al-Tawzī'. 'Alī, Fā'iq al-Šaiḥ (2000). *Iğtiyāl Ša'ab* (the Assassination of a People). London: Markaz al-Buḥūt wa al-Dirāsāt al-Istrātiğīyyah al-'Irāqī. Čālī, 'Alī (2021). *Waṭā'iq Laīsat lal-Bī'a. Maḥṭāt min Sīrah lam takun Dātīyyah.* (Sources that are not for Sale. Moments from a Biography that is not Autobiographical). Dār Akād lal-Našr wa al-Tawzī'. 'Alī, Šādiq (-). *Ma' al-Ḥaqīqah wağāhā la-wağāh.* (Face to Face with the Truth). Bağdād: Mu'assasah al-Širāṭ al-Qawīm. Al-Rakābī, 'Abd al-Amīr (2003). *Bayn Ḥaqibataīn. Min Munāḥaḍah al-Istibḍād ilā Muqāwamah al-Iḥtilāl. Ḥarakah al-Šahīd al-Šadr al-Ṭānī wa Tağrubah al-Ḥayyār al-Ṭalīṭ.* (Between the Two Portfolio. From the Opposition to Tyranny to the Resistance to Occupation. The Movement of the Second Sadr Martyr and the Experience of the Third Option). Bağdād: Dār al-Tayyār lal-Dirāsāt wa al-Našr. Ġābir, 'Abd al-Karīm Ḥalīfah (2010). *Intifāḍah al-Baṣrah Awwal min Dī al-Ḥiğğah 1419 h. – 17/03/1999.* (The Basra Uprising of the First of Dhi al-Hijja 1419 h. – 17/03/1999). Baṣrah: Ašdārāt Ġīm. Al-Ġawādī, 'Alā' (2022). *Marğ'a al-Zaman al-Aš'ab. Al-Sayyid al-Šahīd Muḥammad Muḥammad Šādiq al-Šadr.* (The Religious Source of Emulation for Difficult Times. The Martyr Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr). 2 Vol. Bağdād: Manšūrāt al-Fağr. Al-Ya'cūbī, Muḥammad (2013). *Ġihād wa Iğtiḥād. Muqatafāt min Muḍakkarat Samāḥah al-Marğ'a al-Dīnī al-Šaiḥ Muḥammad al-Ya'cūbī.* (Jihad and Ijtihad. Excerpts from the Memories of his Eminence The Religious Source of Emulation al-Sheikh Muhammad al-Ya'cubi). Nağaf: Dār al-Šādiqāin lal-Ṭabā'ah wa al-Našr wa al-Tawzī'. Al-Ḥizr, 'Abd al-Ṭayf (2009). *Muḥammad al-Šadr. Kifāh al-Ġamāhīr. Tağdīd al-Tayyār al-Šadrī, I'ādah lal-Islāh wa al-Marğ'a'iyyah al-Maṭlūbah.* (Muhammad al-Sadr. The Struggle of the Masses. The Renewal of the Sadrist Trend. The Return to Reform and the Desired Source of Religious Emulation). Bayrūt: Dār al-Fārābī. Al-Nārī, 'Abd al-Kamāl, and al-Asadī, Muḥtār et al. (2002). *al-Šadr al-Ṭānī. Šahīd al-Islāh.* (The Second Sadr. The Martyr of Reform). Bayrūt: Dār al-Furāt. Naḥbah al-Bāḥiṭīn wa al-Mufakkirīn (2008). *Al-Sayyid al-Šahīd Muḥammad al-Šadr. Buḥūt fi Fikrhi wa Minḥağhi wa Inğāzhi al-'Ilmī.* (The Martyr Sayyid Muhammad al-Sadr. Researches in his Thought, Methodology, and Scientific Achievement). 3 Vol. Manšūrāt al-Muḥabbīn lal-Ṭabā'ah wa al-Našr. al-Šadr, Muqtadā (ed. by) (2013). *Mawā'it wa Liqā'āt Ayah Allah al-'Uzmā al-Sayyid al-Šahīd Muḥammad al-Šadr.* (Statements and Interviews by the Grand Ayatollah the Martyr Sayyid Muhammad al-Sadr) Nağaf: Haya'ah Turāt al-Šahīd al-Sa'id al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Šadr. Al-Mayyahi, Abbas al-Zaydi (-). *Al-Safīr al-Ḥāmis : Isti'rāḍ la-Ḥayāh wa Marğ'a'iyyah al-Imām al-Šadr wa al-'Alāqah bayn al-Ḥawzah wa al-Ġamāhīr.* (The Fifth Envoy: A Survey of the Life and Marja'iyya of Imam al-Sadr and the Relationship Between the Hawza and the Masses). (<https://tinyurl.com/mrx2fkzf>). Al-Ḥayyūn, Rašīd (2011). *100 'Am min al-Islām al-Siyāsī bil-'Irāq. I: al-Ši'ah.* (A 100 Years of Political Islam in Iraq. Part I: the Shi'a). Dubaī: Markaz al-Misbār lal-Dirāsāt wa al-Buḥūt.

⁴⁵ For instance, we can list among the hagiographic text the work of al-Jibouri, Yasin T. (2020). *Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Sadiq al-Sadr.* (<https://www.al-islam.org/tribute-sadr-martyrs/sayyid-muhammad-muhammad-sadiq-al-sadr>), which supports the idea that Sadr became the, after the death of al-Ḥū'ī (al-Khoei) in 1992, the only marğ'a'ah (source of emulation, the highest authority in Shi'a religious hierarchy) (marja'ah), when it is quite a well-documented fact that there was an intense competition between Sadr and Sistānī (Sistani) in Iraq. The work of al-Ta'i also shows signs of being very supportive of al-Sadr as it depicts him as the only

will thus build on these works, trying to explore the aforementioned questions and also, when needed, criticize previous approaches to the history of Sadrism.

Sources and Methodology.

As we previously stated, one of the most relevant issues in exploring the history of the Sadrist movement in the 1990s is the difficulty of finding sources on the topic. On the one hand, the temporal proximity of the events is an opportunity, as many of the people who took part in the movement can be interviewed. On the other hand, the same proximity implies that much less has been written by Iraqi historians compared to different topics of Iraqi history, and many archives that could be explored are still unavailable. Many documents internal to the movement are still not accessible, as they maintain a particular relevance for today's political identity and positions of the contemporary Sadrist movement. Considering these issues, this research relied on various sources, which can be divided into five groups and had to be approached differently, considering their different nature and the approaches I used.

Sadr's works.

In the first place, we relied on the works of Sadr, utilizing them to explore Sadr's ideas as a base for the movement ideology and, looking at Sadr's sermons, also a way to spread the more theoretical ideas to a broader public and built on them the Sadrist ideology. These works have never been translated into any European language and have not been analytically explored. Furthermore, considering their topics, they have a substantial symbolic value for constructing Sadrist ideology, as they all deal with central themes. These works are to be

opposer of the Regime, the only religious leader who would do something to speak up against Saddam, supporting Sadr's claims. Al-Ya'cubi was one of the closest aid to Sadr during the 90s; he was one of his students and was granted *iğtihād* (the possibility of interpreting Islam Law's sources with one's independent reasoning) (*ijtihād*) by Sadr himself. Al-Ya'cubi is also often quoted by al-Ta'i as a source close to Sadr (al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 437 and followings). The work of al-Simrī defines Saddam as Ṭāgūt (Taghut) (al-Simrī (2019) *Dawr al-Margā'īyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 34), a tyrant that governs with fear and violence on earth, trying to substitute himself to God, rebelling against god and his will. Al-Simrī also talks about an alliance between Sadr and the authority. Ibid., pp. 34 -35. But later, on page 36, he states that Sadr wanted the end of Saddam's regime. The two things do not forcefully contradict themselves as al-Simrī describes Sadr as the only one who found a way to oppose Saddam in the 90s. Ibid., p. 42. These considerations, of course, do not completely discredit the information provided in these works, exactly in the same way our analysis of the political interest in Western languages' research produced after 2003 does not completely discredit the information they provide. We just want to reflect on the different points from which authors are writing so that we can handle the information and perspective given by these works with more caution.

read in the context of the debates and the development of the Shi'a scholars of the second half of the 20th century and before that. In the first chapter, we try to give a general overview of the history of these debates to contextualize the development of certain aspects of Sadrist ideology, which will also help contextualize these works. Among the significant number of Sadr's works, we have selected a few that, according to our analysis, dealt with more central themes to the movement's identity and politics. In line with this idea, we analyzed the *Mawsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī* (Mawsu'a al-Imam al-Mahdi) (Encyclopedia of the Mahdi) (1992), a four-volume work dealing with the life and occultation of the twelfth Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi and connected with the importance of millenarism and Mahdist ideas within the Sadrist Movement;⁴⁶ *Fiqh al-'Ashā'ir* (Fiqh al-Asha'ir) (The Jurisprudence of the Tribes) (1997), a work dealing with the application and adaptation of Tribal costume to Islamic law.⁴⁷ This work is central in exploring the relationship between Muhammad al-Sadr and the Iraqi tribes and how he tried to gain their support by integrating their costume into Islamic law, attempting a reconciliation between the clerics and the tribal leadership, as the firsts have always been quite critical of tribal costumes and law. Then, we will explore the work dealing with the Revolution of Imam Hussain and his sacrifice, *Aḍwā' 'alā Ṭawrah al-Ḥussaiyn* (Adwa 'ala Thawra al-Hussein) (Lights on Imam Hussain's Revolution) (1997).⁴⁸ Finally, the Sermons of Muhammad al-Sadr, held between 1997 and 1999, will be analyzed to explore the transmission to a broader following of his ideas while also exploring the political expression of Sadr's ideas in a particular phase of the development of the Movement.⁴⁹

Furthermore, while exploring these works more in-depth in the dissertation, we will refer to such debates and point to specific connections. Most of these works were available online, and we could thus use their online version for the beginning of the study. Later, they

⁴⁶ al-Ṣadr, Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī* (The Encyclopedia of Imam Mahdi). Beirut: Dār al-Baṣā'ir. Apparently, the Encyclopedia was published in 1992 in Beirut, but Sadr's biographers say he completed the first volume in 1972 when he was just 29. We also know that Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr wrote the introduction to the Encyclopedia and this was published, also separately, in 1977. al-Asadī (2017). *al-Ṣadr al-Ṭānī*, p. 38. According to another biographer, Sadr started writing the Encyclopedia when he was 15 years old, after receiving from his father's uncle, al-Sayyid Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Ṣadr a book on the Sunna tradition on the Madhi; Sadr then decided to write one himself. 'Alī (2000). *Iḡtiyāl Ṣā'ab*, p. 25.

⁴⁷ al-Ṣadr, Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq (1997). *Fiqh al-'Ashā'ir* (The Jurisprudence of the Tribes). Beirut: Dār al-Baṣā'ir.

⁴⁸ al-Ṣadr, Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq (2010). *Āḍwā' 'alā ṭawrah al-Ḥusseīn* (Lights on the Revolution of Hussein). Beirut: Dār al-Baṣā'ir. The first edition of the book is dated 1997. In the footnotes, we will refer to the year of the edition we could retrieve, which is 2010.

⁴⁹ al-Ṣadr, Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah li-Ṣahīd al-Ṣalāah al-Ġuma'ah* (The Friday Sermons of the Marthyr of the Friday Prayer). Beirut: Dār al-Baṣā'ir.

were made available by the kindness of the *Sadr the Second Communication Office* in Madīnah al-Ṣadr (Madina al-Sadr) (Sadr City), Baghdad.⁵⁰

In this sense, we have also explored Sadr's sermons, both in videos and in their transcription. The research was also based on Sadr's early writings in the magazine *al-Adwā' al-Islāmiyyah* (al-Adwa al-Islamiyya) (The Lights of Islam), connected to the environments of the *Ġama'ah al-'Ulamā'* (Jama'a al-'Ulama'), Muntadā al-Naṣr (Muntada al-Nashr) (The Forum of Publication), and many of the people that later on had central roles in the Ḥizb al-Da'wah (Hizb al-Da'wa) (The Islamic Call Party). This magazine was retrieved in its original publications in the *Maktabah al-Imām Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (Maktabe Imam Amir al-Mu'minin) (the Library of the Imam Commander of the Faithful) in Najaf and a collected volume published by the *Mu'assasah al-Muntazar la-'Ihyā' Turāṭ Al al-Ṣadr* (Mu'assasa al-Muntazar la-'Ihya' Turath Al al-Sadr) (The Awaited One Foundation for the Revival of the Heritage of the Sadr Family) and the *Haya'ah Turāṭ al-Ṣahīd al-Sa'id al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ṣadr* (Haya'a Turath al-Shahid al-Sa'id al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Sadr) (The Body for the Heritage of the Happy Martyr Sayyid Muhammad al-Sadr).

We tried to extrapolate from these works the themes that are the most impactful on the movement's politics and choices and have the most significant role in attracting followers to the movement. We have then tried to connect these themes and ideas of Sadr with those of other scholars that he might have taken inspiration from or to point out differences between his positions or the leaders of different political movements or currents among the Shi'as in Iraq and the region.

Sadrist Memoirs.

The second group of sources we used consists of a small group of memoirs by Sadriststs active in the 1990s that elaborated their experiences within the movement in the forms of memoirs/history of the movement, with strong focuses on the figure of Sadr. These are, of course, very close to the movement itself and, thus, will propose points of view in line with

⁵⁰ The name of this vast neighborhood of Baghdad changed several times since its founding at the end of the 1950s. Initially, it was known as Madīnah al-Tawrah (Madina al-Thawra) (Revolution City), as a celebration of the revolution that toppled the Hashemite Monarchy in 1958. Then, after Saddam took definitely power in Iraq in 1979, Madīnah Ṣaddām (Madina Saddam) (Saddam City) and, finally, after 2003, Madina al-Sadr (Sadr City) referring to the large number of Sadr supporters present in the area. In this research, we will generally use the name used at the time of the events described: Madina Saddam. Instead, we will use the contemporary name, Madina al-Sadr, when referring to places in the neighborhood we visited in the last few years.

this position and also influenced by their eventual role in the movement post-2003 and how the issue treated in their memoirs could impact the policies or the standing of the Sadrist movement in the contemporary Iraqi political arena. These memoirs were primarily available only in Iraq or in Lebanon (where many of these works had been published initially), and even a relatively long search, with some of them made available only by the authors' generosity. As we did with interviews, as we shall see later, we tried to crossreference information collected from these sources with other sources from the archives, memoirs, interviews, and secondary literature.

Sadrist publications, Videos, and Recordings.

The third group of sources that we used to reconstruct and analyze the history of the Sadrist movement in the 1990s is publications by the Sadrists, such as the issues of al-Hudā (al-Huda) (The Guidance) magazine, published at the end of the 1990s, and retrieved at the aforementioned Amir al-Mu'minin Library, or publications of Sadr's biography by the Haya'a Turath al-Shahid al-Sa'id al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Sadr. At the same time, channels close to the movement have published online, on YouTube, videos of Sadr's sermons, interviews or lessons, and recordings of the same. Most of these interviews and many of Sadr's lessons, like the famous *Liqā' al-Ḥannānah* (the Hannane Interview), were later transcribed and collected in volumes by the aforementioned Haya'a Turath.

Interviews.

Considering the general scarcity of sources concerning the historical development of the Sadrist movement in the 1990s, interviews with Sadrist activists or simply Sadr's followers during that period are some of the most precious and rich sources of information for this research. Thus, they represent the fourth kind of sources we used in reconstructing the history of the Sadrist movement.

The interviews allowed us to understand the mechanisms of the building and expansion of the movement at a microhistorical level, giving us precious insights into the reasons why the movement got hold among particular groups of people or, in particular, how the movement worked from the inside and how things happened among Sadr's wukala and Sadr's followers. The interviews also allowed us to provide new data on two of the most

understudied and still obscure periods of development of the Sadrist movement in the 1990s, the period from 1991 to 1997, before the start of the Friday prayers, and the period from Sadr's death to 2003, before the US-led invasion of Iraq (1999 – 2003). Furthermore, the interviews also provided new details on the period 1997 – 1999, specifying some of the already known data on this period.

The interviews would have been impossible without four research visits to Iraq between 2021 and 2024. These visits to Iraq allowed us to familiarize ourselves with the country, the places the Sadrist movement was based in, and the Sadrist environment, even beyond the interviews themselves, by observing personal relationships, gatherings, and ceremonies. At the same time, visits to important Sadrist sites, such as the site of Sadr's assassination, Sadr's mausoleum, Madina al-Sadr, and its mosques, the Great Mosque of Kufa, the sanctuary of Kāẓimiyyah (Kadhimiyye) and the Ḥawzah al-'Ilmiyyah (Hawza al-'Ilmiyya) (The Place of Learning) schools in Najaf, were also fundamental in enriching our understanding of Sadrism.

During these four research visits, we interviewed 38 Sadr's representatives, Sadr's followers, and people involved with the Sadrist movement who were not representatives or simple followers; among these interviews, we also had the opportunity to interview people outside the Sadrist movement, who were close to the al-Khu'i's (al-Ḥū'ī) family networks or Sistānī (Sistani), to provide an alternative point of view on events.⁵¹ Furthermore, during our visits to Iraq, we could have several conversations with people we met, which were not counted in the interviews but still contributed to our understanding of the Sadrist phenomenon.

To carry out these interviews, we had first to make contact with the Sadrists, and we managed to do so by reaching members of the modern Sadrist movement through two channels. During a visit to Jordan in the Fall of 2021, we met members of the Iraqi community in Jordan and through a historian part of this community, Ṣafwah Fāhim Kāmil (Safwa Fahem Kamel) ([See interviews' picture n. 1](#)), who, through one of his personal acquaintances, we got in touch with a member of the Political wing of the Sadrist movement, Hāšim al-Šamā' (Hashem al-Shama'). In turn, he put us in touch with other members of the Sadrist movement who were active in the 1990s, and, thanks to a "snowball" effect, I could extend my network of contacts and acquaintances among the Sadrists. Every person we

⁵¹ See [annex n. 4 table n. 1](#) for a complete list of all the people interviewed, a short description of the interview and [photos of the interviews](#).

could interview provided us with several new possible contacts to interview, and every time, we arrived with a recommendation and the presentation of a larger group of people, some of whom were even well-known among the Sadrists. This factor helped us overcome a certain lack of trust among the people we had the opportunity to interview, having more fruitful conversations.

Not all the leads brought good results; some of the people we could interview or even the institutions we tried to get in touch with, such as the Institute of the Two Sadr,⁵² even after providing a Passport, a CV, and a letter from the University, did not agree to meet and to be interviewed. The second channel of communication with Sadrists was opened with the help of an Italian professor working on Middle Eastern history, who put us in touch with a journalist with long experience in Iraq, and, in turn, he put us in touch with a member of the movement. This person, Aḥmad Abū Ġaʿafar (Ahmed Abu Jafar), introduced us to other Sadrists, following very similar dynamics to what had happened with the first contact.

Trust had a central role in the interviews as we tried to investigate the personal trajectories of people to avoid a repetition of the movement's official narrative, which would emerge from a more superficial interview with someone not trusted. For the same reason, we tried interviewing the same people more than once and investigating their lived experiences, following questions like “When and how did you hear for the first time about Muhammad al-Sadr?” to understand how Sadr's *marġaʿiyyah* (marjaʿiyya) (the institution of the religious source of emulation) was spread at the beginning of the 1990s; or “in which kind of activities of the Sadrist movement did you take part?”, to explore the kind of proselytism the Sadrist movement was carrying out to attract followers. We chose not to follow a rigid set of questions and to adapt a general interview scheme to the different people we spoke to and their roles within the movement. In general, the scheme of the interview was as follows: we tried first to investigate the person's family and social background, exploring, in some instances, the family history; we then tried to follow in chronological order the main events of the development of Sadrism in the 1990s, trying to view each one of them from the perspective of the interviewee, understanding if he was present at a specific event, and how he remembered it, if not if he had heard of it and in which way.

In general, when not looking at information from the interviews as part of the Sadrist narrative but as information to reconstruct a specific event, we weighed them very carefully.

⁵² Muʿassasah al-Ṣadraīn lal-Dirāsāt al-Istrāṭiġiyyah (Muʿassasa al-Sadrein lal-Dirasat al-Istratijiyyah) (The Two Sadr Foundation for Strategic Studies). <https://alsadrain.com/about.htm>.

In the first place, as already highlighted, we tried to follow the personal trajectory of the person I was interviewing. We tried to avoid the official and well-known movement's version of Sadrist history, intended to glorify the movement's past. For instance, we tried to ask questions such as "Where were you during the 1991 Intifāḍah (Intifada) (uprising)?" or "Did you take part in the Intifada of 1991?" instead of asking questions like "What did the Sadrist movement do during the 1991 Intifada?" or "What was Sadr's role in the 1991 Intifada?" if we wanted to investigate the events of the 1991 revolt. The answer to the two last questions probably would have been the official narrative of the movement that highlighted Sadr's important role in the 1991 Intifada, his revolutionary position in contrast to the moderate and quietist position of Āyah Allāh al-Khu'i.

On the other hand, the personal questions placed the interviewee in the events he lived in the first person, helped reconstruct lived experiences beyond official narratives, letting contradictions between the two emerge. For instance, in the case of the 1991 Intifada, when asked about their personal experience of it, many people, especially those in Madina Saddam, never mentioned Sadr. Also, when asked about their personal experiences, many interviewees indicated that they heard Muhammad al-Sadr's name in 1993 for the first time. These examples highlight that Sadr did not have such an essential role if his name was not known among the revolt's leaders, not even to people in Najaf, thus minimizing Sadr's role in these events. This information, for instance, contradicts the movement's official narrative.

Furthermore, we tried to cross-reference all information from the interviews with other sources. As previously highlighted, we interviewed people close to Sistani or al-Khu'i, trying to confirm or contradict information from interviews with Sadrists. We did the same with archival sources, interviews with different people inside the Sadrist movement, secondary sources, and the like. Interestingly, most of the information was confirmed by this crossreferencing, especially with the archival sources.

We also spent time with the interviewees outside of the interviews themselves, sharing meals, casual conversations, and visits to sites, both of interest for our research and not, in order not to create a relationship only focused on a utilitarian approach to the people we had the opportunity to interview.

Finally, in most of the interviews, we decided not to record the conversations but only to take notes, as we felt that a recorded conversation might lead to a more official account of the events, while an interview that felt more like a conversation brought to more personal perspectives and reconstruction of individual trajectories.

While the historical accounts concerning the Sadrist movement in the 1990s are mostly considered a “safe” topic to talk about, especially among Sadrists, some of the people close to al-Khu’i’s network or Sistani’s asked not to be mentioned by name and, thus, we will use a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. As a matter of fact, while this topic is considered “safe,” there are some concerns about the repercussions that negative views on Muhammad al-Sadr and Sadrism in the 1990s might have on the contemporary Iraqi political arena.

The history of the origins of Sadrism in the 1990s and the narrative on the movement’s opposition to Saddam’s Regime are cornerstones of the contemporary Sadrist narrative to support and justify their claim to power. Furthermore, within this narrative, the figure of Muhammad al-Sadr assumed almost an aura of sanctity, especially after his assassination by the Regime, that dispelled all the rumors of his possible cooperation with the Regime, canonizing him as an opponent to Saddam. Public criticism of this narrative might thus be viewed as an attack on the contemporary Sadrist movement and an attempt to discredit it.

Similarly, we have decided to modify the name and date when quoting particular interviews on specific topics. In these cases, even if the interviewee permitted us to quote his name, we have felt that certain information that emerged in the conversation when singled out and analyzed as we did in this dissertation might have a different interpretation and endanger people who gave us such information.

In the thesis, we will use interviews by quoting them in the footnotes as a source for specific information and quoting them in the text when they provide a particular exemplary story or experience that can help us understand the development and dynamics of the Sadrist movement. Apart from the aforementioned table at the end of the thesis, presenting all the different interviews I held; the first time, we will mention a specific interview by quoting the interviewee in the text, we will also provide a brief description of the person and the circumstance of the interview in the footnotes.

As we already mentioned in the thanks at the beginning of the dissertation, this research would not have been possible without the kindness of the many people we met in Iraq who were so nice to dedicate to us and our questions many hours of their time.

Archives.

The fifth group of sources used for this research is represented by archival sources, mainly from the Ba’ath Party archives held at the Hoover Institution.

As most of the archival sources come from the Ba'ath Party archives, and as this archive has a particular story and structure and is surrounded by some controversies intertwined with recent Iraqi history, we will dedicate some space to analyzing these issues concerning the Ba'ath Party archives.

The Ba'ath Party Archive.

As the Hoover archivists stated in the Hoover Digest, the Ba'ath Party Collection represents *the world's largest and most significant archive of a modern authoritarian regime*.⁵³ As such, this collection represents an invaluable source for Iraqi history and a tool to explore the internal mechanisms of a modern authoritarian regime. Thus, we will focus on the archive's potential to provide information on the recent history of Iraq. Nevertheless, its broader value as a source for studying authoritarian regimes and its particular history is to be mentioned to understand the archive's importance and political interests.

The "Hizb al-Ba'ath al-'Arabī al-Ishtirākī Records (Ba'ath Party Records)," as the collection is titled on the Hoover Institution website,⁵⁴ gathers two primary datasets: the documents created by the Regional Commands of the Ba'ath Party, and a collection of video and printed material created by the Iraqi Memory Foundation.⁵⁵ We will mainly draw on the first dataset, which contains the documents of interest for reconstructing the Sadrist's history, such as the reports produced by the Ba'ath Regional Commands from distinct areas of Iraq or studies by different Ba'ath Party Commission and the like.⁵⁶ This dataset was first found

⁵³ Haidar, Hadi and Ghazal, Rayan and Lunde, Erik and McElwee Cannon, Jean (2021). *Mission to Baghdad*. The Hoover Archives Digest, Vol. No. 1, 196-213.

⁵⁴ <https://www.hoover.org/library-archives/collections/hizb-al-bath-al-arabi-al-ishtiraki-records-bath-party-records>.

⁵⁵ The Iraqi Memory Foundation (IMF), according to the Hoover Institution page on Online Archives of California, is a "private nonprofit organization for documentation of Iraqi history under the Ba'th party regime. It was founded by Kanan Makiya in 1992 as the Iraq Research and Documentation Project (IRDP) at Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies." <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt5m3nf2b3/>. The organization was first registered in Washington, DC, and later in Baghdad.

⁵⁶ The Regional Commands Collection is formed by the files found in Baghdad in 2003 and by the North Iraq Dataset (NIDS). The NIDS contains the documents of the Ba'ath Regional Commands of Iraqi Kurdistan abandoned by the Ba'athist forces when the US-led coalition imposed a no-fly zone over the area. The documents were airlifted to the US in late 1991 as part of an agreement between the Kurdish Forces and the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, led by Peter Galbraith. This collection was initially housed at the National Archives in Washington, DC. Later, the documents were studied by Human Rights Watch, the Pentagon and the Iraqi Memory Foundation in order to find proof of the Anfal Campaign against the Kurds in 1988 to be used in the first case of genocide ever brought to the International Court of Justice. The documents were stored at the University of Colorado Boulder in 1998 and, from there, quietly sent back to Iraq in 2005 in preparation for the trial of Saddam Hussain. In Iraq, the files have remained in the custody of the Iraqi High Tribunal and the Ministry of Justice in Baghdad for the last 18 years. The digitalized version of this collection later joined the documents captured in 2003 in Baghdad and became the Ba'ath Party Records held at the

in a basement in Baghdad in 2003, after the US-led invasion.⁵⁷ The documents, comprising around ten million pages of the Ba'ath Party records, were then analyzed by the Iraq Survey Group (ISG) to find evidence of Iraq's possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and Saddam's links with al-Qa'eda (al-Qā'edah) at their facility in Qatar.⁵⁸ When it became evident to the ISG, through the analysis of these documents and different sites in Iraq, that there were no WMDs nor links to al-Qa'eda to be found, the collection was entrusted in 2004 to the Iraqi Memory Foundation, led by Kanan Makiya.⁵⁹ Then, in 2005, the documents, comprising the Ba'ath Party Records and the IMF collection, were moved to the United States, allegedly for security issues.⁶⁰ They were stored in a military facility at Rocket Center in West Virginia.⁶¹

In 2007, the IMF contacted the Hoover Institution to create an agreement to store and digitalize the collections. The collection was subsequently transferred from the Army facility in West Virginia to the Hoover Institution at Stanford in 2008. There, the documents were electronically processed. The collection was partially digitalized in Iraq, and later, the process was completed at the Rocket Center Facility.⁶² Still, the technicians had no tools to insert metadata simultaneously, so much of the work at the Hoover focused on this point, intending to make the vast collection easily searchable for researchers.⁶³

After almost ten years of storage in the Hoover Tower at Stanford, in 2018, preparation started to return the collection to Iraq. In the Summer of 2019, the documents were moved from the Hoover Institution to an undisclosed location. After a year of talks between the Iraqi Government and its ambassador to the US, Fareed Yasseen, the Hoover Institution, the IMF, and the US Department of Defence and State Department, the date was set for the collection

Hoover Institution. Alsaibhi, Wisam H. (2019). *Weaponizing Iraq's Archives*. Middle East Report Vol. 291, 3-9. P. 5. Brill, Micheal P. (2020). *Setting the Records Straight*. War on the Rocks. <https://warontherocks.com/2020/07/setting-the-records-straight-in-iraq/>.

⁵⁷ Haidar, Ghazal, Lunde and McElwee Cannon (2021). *Mission to Baghdad*. P. 200. The article of Jamal Ameadi on Daraj Media provides an interesting account of how the archives were found in 2003. <https://daraj.media/en/53961/>.

⁵⁸ Alsaibhi (2019). *Weaponizing Iraq's Archives*. P. 3.

⁵⁹ Kanan Makiya was a leading figure in the Iraqi diaspora in the US, lobbying for the invasion of Iraq and the removal of Saddam's regime. He had close ties with the second Bush administration. Caswell, Michelle (2011). "Thank You Very Much, Now Give Them Back": *Cultural Property and the Fight over the Baath Party Records*. The American Archivist, Vol. 74, No. 1, 211-240. Pp. 213, 214. Alsaibhi (2019). *Weaponizing Iraq's Archives*. Pp. 5, 7. Montgomery, Bruce P. and Brill, Michael P. (2019). *The Ghosts of Past Wars live on in a Critical Archive*. War on the Rocks. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/09/the-ghosts-of-past-wars-live-on-in-a-critical-archive/>.

⁶⁰ Haidar, Ghazal, Lunde and McElwee Cannon (2021). *Mission to Baghdad*. P. 203.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 205.

⁶² Brill (2020). *Setting the Records Straight*.

⁶³ Haidar, Ghazal, Lunde and McElwee Cannon (2021). *Mission to Baghdad*. P. 207.

return to Iraq.⁶⁴ In August 2020, the documents left the US and finally returned to Iraq, arriving on August 31.⁶⁵ The collection will then join the much larger (between 100 and 120 million pages) set of documents from Saddam Hussain's Regime quietly returned to Iraq in 2013 during the Obama administration.⁶⁶

The collection's location in Iraq remains unknown and unavailable to researchers like the archives returned in 2005 and 2013.⁶⁷

At present, the collection available at the Hoover Institution is entirely digital. The files are divided into two main groups, as we already pointed out: the Ba'ath Regional Commands Files and the IMF collection. We will mainly rely on the first group of records. This collection has several sections, among which the main ones are the Nord Iraq Dataset (NIDS), the Kuwait Dataset (KDS), the School Register Dataset (BRCC SRDS), the Boxfiles Dataset (BRCC Boxfiles), and the Membership Files Dataset.⁶⁸ We will draw mainly from the BRCC Boxfiles, comprising around 2.8 million pages. Such a dataset contains documents from the Ba'athist administration, personnel, command structure, party institution, state organization, and ideology. Through their analysis, we can gain insights into many aspects of Iraqi society and all these fields of life the Regime was trying to control, from education to work-life and religion.

The Controversies Concerning the Ba'ath Party Archives.

Even though at the time of the writing of this work, all the known original Ba'ath Party documents taken to the US by US military forces have been returned to Iraq, their removal from the country in the first place had raised many complaints and protests from Iraqis and

⁶⁴ The process of repatriation of the documents housed at the Hoover Institution was made easier as in May 2020, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, one of the co-founders of the IMF, chief of the Iraqi secret service, and a political figure close to the US, was selected to become the new prime minister of Iraq. Brill (2020). *Setting the Records Straight*.

⁶⁵ Haidar, Ghazal, Lunde and McElwee Cannon (2021). *Mission to Baghdad*. Pp. 210, 211.

⁶⁶ Brill (2020). *Setting the Records Straight*. This vast collection, which represents 90% of all the documents produced by the Ba'ath Regime, was made partly available by the Conflict Records Research Center. The Center has made available around 143,000 documents and 200 hours of audio recordings of private meetings between Saddam Hussain and his close aids. The rest of the 120 million documents and 1,800 hours of recordings are still to be made available. Unfortunately, when the Conflict Records Research Center's (CRRC) funding was withdrawn in 2015, even the documents available became inaccessible. Montgomery and Brill (2019). *The Ghosts of Past Wars live on in a Critical Archive*.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c84j0cg3/>.

foreign academics or archivists.⁶⁹ Adding to these condemnations, even if the physical copies are back in Iraq, the long years of absence have resulted in the fact that the only way to access these documents is through the digital copies held at different US institutions. Moreover, only one of these institutions, the Hoover Institution, is open to the public. The Conflict Records Research Center, which holds the most extensive collection, is available only to researchers with US Government security clearance and not for independent research.⁷⁰ Even reaching the open-access archives at the Hoover Institution is not an easy process. First of all, it requires a visa to the US, which for most Iraqi or Middle Eastern-based researchers might not be easy to get. Secondly, the Hoover Institution is situated in one of the most expensive areas of the US, adding an economic barrier.⁷¹ Other complaints were grounded on broader worries besides these practical considerations, which still have to be considered among the factors making it more difficult for Iraqi researchers to explore their national history.

In 2008, the previous director of the Iraqi National Library and Archive (INLA), Sa'ad Eskandar (Sa'ad Eskandar), along with the last director of the Iraq National Museum, Donny George Youkhanna (Dūnī Ġūrġ Youkhanna), repeatedly demanded the return of the Ba'ath Archives to Iraq.⁷² Joined by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA), they expressed concerns about the presence of such sensitive information, including personal data gathered by the Ba'ath security services, in the hands of private and foreign institutions, fearing misuse and condemning it as an act of pillage.⁷³

These fears have taken an actual dimension according to the analysis made by Wisam Alsahibi of the US's use of the Iraqi Ba'athist Archives. In his work, Alsahibi highlights how the US government seized the Ba'athist documents at different moments and places to use

⁶⁹ In her article on the topic, Bet-Shlimon mentions an unknown number of Ba'ath documents held by the US Department of Defense. Bet-Shlimon, Arbella (2018). *Preservation or Plunder? The ISIS Files and a History of Heritage Removal in Iraq*. MERIP. <https://merip.org/2018/05/preservation-or-plunder-the-isis-files-and-a-history-of-heritage-removal-in-iraq/>.

⁷⁰ Montgomery and Brill (2019). *The Ghosts of Past Wars live on in a Critical Archive*.

⁷¹ Bet-Shlimon (2018). *Preservation or Plunder?* The Hoover Institution does provide scholarships for researchers willing to explore the archives, as in the author's case, but this only partially solves the accessibility problem. A proposal to open a terminal to consult the digitalized archives from the Iraqi National Archive (Dār al-Kutub wa al-Waṭā'iq al-Waṭāniyyah) in Baghdad has been made at the "A Decade of Research Using Archives of Ba'athist Iraq: What We Now Know" conference, held at the Hoover Institution on August 17-18, 2023 (<https://tinyurl.com/vkyp7pj5>). Nevertheless, no official response has been made to this proposal, and unofficial responses questioned the safety of people whose name is mentioned in the archive to have their data made public in Iraq.

⁷² Bet-Shlimon (2018). *Preservation or Plunder?* The call for repatriation by the SAA and ACA came in 2008, after a North American tour by Eskandar to sensitize on the issue of the Ba'ath party Records and the dire state of the INLA. Caswell (2011). *"Thank You Very Much, Now Give Them Back"*. P. 212.

⁷³ Ibid. Brill (2020). *Setting the Records Straight*.

them for anti-Ba’thist propaganda. This propaganda would highlight the Ba’athist atrocities committed during the 35 years of rule over Iraq, focusing more on using them to justify the US-led Iraq invasion, as the original reasons for finding WMDs and ties to al-Qa’eda became less and less plausible, rather than holding the Regime accountable for its crimes.⁷⁴ The seizure was operated instead by calling on keeping the Ba’ath accountable and preserving Iraq’s history. The latter was an excuse already used by early 20th-century archaeologists when plundering Iraq’s historical artifacts.⁷⁵

The concerns expressed by Eskandar, joined by the SAA and the ACA, sparked a fierce debate between the IMF, the Hoover Institution, and the Iraqi government. Those supporting the return of the records to Iraq stated that it was not the place of any foreign institution, such as the IMF or the Hoover, to determine where to store the documents and whether they were in danger in Iraq. Initially, the Iraqi government responded by supporting the IMF and the Hoover Institution as the rightful depository of the Ba’ath Records as decided by the ad-interim Iraqi government in 2004. Even though already the connection between the ad-interim Iraqi government, the IMF founders, the Bush administration, and the conservative Hoover Institution would shed some doubts over the entire process of entrustment of the Records, the initial support of the government was revealed to be a fabrication of Mustafa al-Kadhimi (Muṣṭafā al-Kāẓimī), one of the co-founders of the IMF and an Iraqi politician.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Hoover’s officials and supporters of the IMF transfer of the Records to the US argued that the documents would be better preserved and stored in the US. At the same time, the INLA did not have the proper means to preserve and protect the Ba’ath Archives.

Furthermore, there were also concerns about the possible misuse of the documents in post-invasion Iraq. One of the central preoccupations was the use of the names present in the archives as a weapon in the sectarian civil war.⁷⁷ Still, this argument does not consider the origin of the post-invasion chaos and the responsibilities of the US army in being unable to maintain order in Iraq and preventing much of the looting after invading the country and toppling the Ba’ath Regime.

⁷⁴ Alsahibi (2019). *Weaponizing Iraq’s Archives*. P. 3.

⁷⁵ Bet-Shlimon (2018). *Preservation or Plunder?*

⁷⁶ Caswell (2011). “*Thank You Very Much, Now Give Them Back*”. P. 219. Mustafa al-Kadhimi was also prime minister in Iraq when it was agreed to bring back the documents held at the Hoover Institution to the country.

⁷⁷ Montgomery, Bruce P. (2014). *US Seizure, Exploitation, and Restitution of Saddam Hussein’s Archive of Atrocity*. *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 559-593. P. 560.

After this last development, the Hoover and IMF's representatives met with the representatives of the SAA in August 2008 to discuss the issue. Still, no statement was made after the meeting, and the controversy went no further.⁷⁸

Even though, as we previously stated, at the time of the writing, all the known Ba'ath Records seized by the US forces have been returned to Iraq, their seizure by the IMF and the US military probably helped protect them, even if from the chaos created by their very own invasion. However, many aspects of this story are still to be explored.

The consequences of many years of mislocation of these archives still weigh on Iraq and its possibility of dealing with its recent past. Furthermore, the seizure of these archives has also to be contextualized into the US knowledge production tied to their political and imperialist interest in the Middle East and, specifically, in Iraq. As Michelle Caswell has highlighted, the US's possession of the Ba'ath Records adds a new layer to the American power in Iraq, summing up the military, economic, and political power to the possibility of creating knowledge on the country's recent history, shaping the narratives around it.⁷⁹ An opportunity that has been, and continues, to be denied to most Iraqis, at least concerning the Ba'ath Records.

Precautions and Limitations in Using the Ba'ath Party Archives.

Even though the Ba'ath Party Archives is a central source for recent Iraqi history, their exploration must be taken cautiously, especially to find information about an opposition movement. Going through the documents, we have to consider all the issues connected with reading a document produced by the bureaucracy of an authoritarian regime. In the first place, it will be necessary to read the Regime's own language and terminology. For instance, when searching for references to the 1991 Intifada, we will not find any reference to these events as the Intifada Sha'abaniyyah (*Intifāḍah Ša'abaniyyah*), the 1991 Uprising, or the like. On the other hand, these events will be named "The Events of Treason and Disloyalty" (*Šafḥah al-ḥiyānah wa al-ḡadr*). Any mention of "revolution, revolutionary war, revolutionary activities" has to be interpreted as a reference to the Regime, as it portrayed itself as a revolutionary force.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 221.

⁷⁹ Caswell (2011). "Thank You Very Much, Now Give Them Back". P. 239.

In contrast, all the opponents were branded as traitors or with similar terms. Alternatively, the Second Gulf War is branded as “The Mother of all Battles” (*Umm al-Ma‘ārik*). The Shi’as, for instance, are often referred to as the Ja’afariyyah (*Ġa‘afariyyah*) and not Shi’a.

Another factor to be considered is the party members’ ignorance about specific phenomena, such as the inner mechanisms of the Hawza or the subtle discussion of Shi’a theology.⁸⁰ Personal and political prejudices and the ideas about what superiors in the hierarchy wanted to hear on a particular topic are all factors to pay attention to in reading these documents.⁸¹

Other than these precautions and limitations, the vastity of these archives, which still represent only a fraction of the Ba’ath Party Records, presents a huge challenge for researchers. The archive is divided into multiple sections, and each section can be searched using the document number to look for a specific paper. Otherwise, it can be searched using the subdivisions made by the archivists at the different stages of the digitalization of the material. For instance, by opening the BRCC Boxfiles, we will find different categories, such as “Security” and “Party Institutions.” By choosing, for example, “Security,” we will be presented with a list of sections, among them “1991 Uprising”, “1991 South Uprising”, and the like. A list of numbered box files appears when one opens one of these links. We can choose one of the boxes and are presented with a summary of the box’s contents. This is a summary compiled by the teams that digitalized the documents, comprised of keywords describing the box’s contents. These keywords also allow us to search the collection using specific words. For instance, we could use the word “Sadr” to search the collection, and the result would present all the boxes containing the word “Sadr” in their summary.

The difficulty in this kind of search is that once we find a box whose description contains the word we are looking for or a subject we are interested in, we still have to go

⁸⁰ This observation, apart from personal experience in the Ba’ath Party Archives, also stems from the discussion of Lisa Blaydes’ work I undertook in the draft of my first chapter. Professor Blaydes’ work also draws on this Archive. It warns on the incapacity of the Regime to penetrate the internal dynamics of specific Iraqi communities, mainly the Kurds and the Shi’a community. Blaydes draws this conclusion from the observation that collective punishment was used when no intelligence could be detailed enough to find the direct responsibility behind anti-regime activities. Blaydes, Lisa (2018), *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Pp. 312- 313.

⁸¹ Joosh Hilterman, International Crisis Group Program Director for Middle East & North Africa, during the Iraqi History Conference “A Decade of Research Using Archives of Ba’athist Iraq: What We Know Now” (August 17-18, 2023), expressed a similar doubt. He highlighted how the archives reveal more about the Ba’ath Regime’s vision of Iraqi society than on Iraqi society itself, and thus should be used with caution in studying the latter.

through the whole box to find the right documents. In some instances, if we look for documents concerning Sadr and find a box quoting the word “Sadr” in its summary, we might find only one document pertaining to this topic, usually among several hundreds of pages in every box. Considering that the documents were digitalized as .jpg files and the lack of reliable OCR programs for Arabic, particularly handwritten Arabic, the papers can not be searched, and much time is spent scrolling through the files. This would not be an uncommon situation for an archive if not because the boxes contain a very different array of material, spanning from reports of daily activities of some local section of the Ba’ath to more general reports on other political, cultural, or social issues, to propaganda material, letters and the like. Furthermore, the content of the boxes is not even chronologically ordered, so in a box dated 1991, we could find files from July of that year, then January, and later December.

Concerning the more specific topic of this research, Sadrism, the difficulties involve the lack of material and references. We generally find very few references to Muhammad al-Sadr, mainly in documents dating from 1997 to 1999.⁸² References to his followers are also found in later records. Few more references to Muhammad al-Sadr and his followers are found in documents on other topics indirectly connected to the aforementioned subject. Different phenomena might cause this scarcity of records. In the first place, relying on the study mentioned above by Professor Blaydes, this scarcity could be due to the ignorance of the Ba’ath Party members about the internal issues of the Shi’a community. At least until the Sadrist Movement became large and active enough to be noticed in 1997. This is a probable explanation and the internal narrative of the movement’s history, which sees 1997-1998 as the moment when Sadrism emerged as a significant religious movement.⁸³ These conclusions also fit with the observations from the archives. The control operated by the Ba’ath Regime over the Iraqi society was capillary.⁸⁴ Records from the different Ba’ath Commands in Baghdad show how the Party had informants widely distributed in civil society, reporting on shop owners, customers, and conversations.⁸⁵ Mosques made no exceptions and were strictly under surveillance, as we shall see. As we discussed quoting Blaydes’ work, only very particular sections of society or communities could escape this

⁸² We also must consider that more material on Sadr and Sadrism could be found in the CRRC documents, which comprise the majority of the total Ba’ath archives (100-120 million documents).

⁸³ Phone interview with Jafar A., a Sadrist Activist during the 1990s, held on 31/01/23.

⁸⁴ Blaydes (2018). *State of Repression*. P. 261. Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, pp. 1, 131.

⁸⁵ BRCC 2348 0000 0202.

control. Secondly, the informality of the Sadrist network at its beginnings might have protected it from a strict Regime's surveillance.

Other Archives.

Besides the massive Ba'ath Party archives, we could visit and research at the American University of Beirut newspaper archives from the Middle Eastern Region and Lebanon.⁸⁶ We focused, in particular, on Lebanese newspapers, trying to find traces and news of the impact of the Sadrist movement in the 1990s outside of Iraq. In this archive, We primarily focused on Al-Safīr and al-Nahār issues from March to May 1991 to the end of February 1999, trying to determine if Sadr's participation in the 1991 Intifada or news of the Friday prayers had reached outside Iraq.

Overview of the Dissertation Structure.

This work will be divided into four main parts and into smaller chapters. It will follow chronologically the development of the Sadrist movement throughout the 1990s, starting with an introductory chapter, followed by a chapter on the 1992 – 1996 period, one on the 1997 – 1999 period, and finally one on the 1999 – 2003 period.

First Part.

The first chapter will consist mainly of a historical introduction to set the stage for the events of the 1990s and the birth and development of the Sadrist movement. We will thus explore, in the first place, the evolution of the Shi'i debates on power and authority, quickly outlining the history of these debates and then providing some examples of scholars contemporary to Muhammad al-Sadr who have engaged in these discussions. This examination will give a broader context for the emergence of political Shi'ism in the 20th century. It will shed light on the context in which Sadr's works are to be read and what kind of opinions and scholars Sadr responded to or inspired himself in his works. We will then quickly outline the emergence of the Shi'a Islamist movement in Iraq from the late 1950s to

⁸⁶ <https://www.aub.edu.lb/Libraries/asc/Collections/Pages/Periodicals.aspx>. Here a catalogue of the newspapers and journals held at the AUB archive.

the 1980s. Then, we will look at the Ba'ath politics toward religion and religious and Islamist groups, trying to understand how the Iraqi Regime was trying to control the Iraqi religious environment by repressing it, infiltrating, and manipulating it. In this way, we will provide some tools to understand the basis of the Regime's politics in the 1990s, such as the "Faith Campaign" or their success in repressing the Shi'a Islamist movement during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. Secondly, the chapter will explore the repression that hit the Shi'a Islamist movement in the aforementioned years and the almost total destruction of the Shi'a Islamist movement inside Iraq during the 1980s, also in connection with the start of the Iran – Iraq War (1980 – 1988), both events tied to the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The war mobilization in Iraq, which regarded a large part of the Iraqi male population, gave many opportunities to the Iraqi Regime to infiltrate Iraqi society, and thus also the religious environment, and strengthen its control. This contributed to the repression of the Islamist movement and the infiltration of the religious environment. Furthermore, the War also had a heavy impact on the southern and central regions of Iraq in terms of casualties, thus putting on these communities, mostly Shi'a, much of the burden of the war with Iran. We then tried to delineate the 1980s generation of Islamist activists who created and acted in these dramatic circumstances.

Thirdly, we will try to analyze the impact of the 1990 Invasion of Kuwait and its consequences, such as the UN Sanctions on Iraq, the 1991 Second Gulf War, and the 1991 March Revolts, and the impacts on the Iraqi population. As we will see, these events had very dire consequences on the Iraqis living in the southern and central regions of Iraq, further expanding their grievances against the Regime.

In the fourth place, we will also explore the death of Ayatollah al-Khu'i, its consequences, and the void of power in the Hawza that this death left, opening a struggle for control of the hawza. We will also analyze the Regime's interests in this struggle and its connection with the beginning of the 1993 "Faith Campaign" and its push for an Arab marja' a (marja') (Religious source of emulation). From these events, the generation of the 1990s Islamists emerged, and, chief among them, the figure of Muhammad al-Sadr, of whom we will provide a biographical exploration, looking at the history of the Sadr family and the formative years of Muhammad al-Sadr between the late 1950s and the end of the 1980s. The last ten years of Muhammad al-Sadr's biography will be explored along with the development of the Sadrist movement in the following chapters.

This chapter, being an introductory chapter, will be primarily based on secondary sources while also drawing some contributions from the primary sources of this work. It will provide a historical context in which to set the following chapter and in which to read the events narrated in the other three chapters.

Second Part.

The second chapter will deal mainly with the reconstruction of the period from 1992 to 1997, probably the most understudied period in the history of the Sadrist movement in the 1990s. It first will retrace the events around the opening of Sadr's office as a marja' and the initial spread of his marja'iyya, exploring the mechanism of its diffusion and the reasons for its expansion. Secondly, it will follow the reopening of Najaf's religious schools at the hands of Sadr and his first followers. This was an attempt to increase the number of students in the Hawza and recruit among them agents for Sadr who could act as his *wukala'* throughout Iraq, opening offices for him in different areas of the country, reporting his *fatāwā* (pl. of *fatwā*) (fatwa), and collecting religious taxes for him. In this chapter, we will explore the system of the schools in the Hawza, the exams to access the Hawza, and the network that Sadr started building around himself, gathering students. We will also analyze how Sadr recruited his *wukala'* among the students and sent them throughout Iraq. We also explore the *wukala'*'s activities and duties in teaching Islam, spreading Sadr's word and religiosity in Iraqi society, and collecting religious taxes for Sadr. Fourthly, we will also explore the construction of a series of committees in Sadr's office in Najaf to manage the growing complexity of this network and its different activities. We will highlight how this was a turning point for the Sadrist movement when it started mutating from simply a network of a marja', a religious leader, to a relatively more structured organization. In the fifth section of this chapter, we will explore Sadr's works as the basis and source of the ideas that the *wukala'* were spreading around Iraq. Apart from exploring the more theoretical works, we will also explore how these works were presented to the Iraqi people and how all the different aspects also fit Sadr's reform project of the Hawza and Iraqi society more in general.

Finally, in the sixth and last section of the chapter, we will trace the sociological profiles of Sadr's followers to whom his preachings were aimed, highlighting the tribal connections of many communities in neighborhoods that became Sadrist strongholds during the 1990s. In this context, we will also refer to the work by Muhammad al-Sadr *Fiqh al-*

‘Ašāir (The Jurisprudence of the Tribes) (1997), a treaty dealing with applying and adapting Tribal costume to Islamic law.⁸⁷ This work is central in exploring the relationship between Muhammad al-Sadr and the Iraqi tribes and how he tried to gain their support by integrating their costume into Islamic law, attempting a reconciliation between the clerics and the tribal leadership, as the firsts have always been quite critical of tribal costumes and law. We will also explore the repression by the Regime part toward Sadrists during the period 1992 – 1997, highlighting the relative ease with which the movement could expand.

This chapter is almost entirely based on interviews since we could find no documents in the Ba’ath Party archives concerning this period of the movement’s history. Also, the literature on this period is exceptionally scarce.

Third Part.

In the third chapter, we will deal with the most studied period of the history of the Sadrist movement in the 1990s, from 1997 to 1999, in which Sadr called for holding communal prayers with sermons every Friday. In the first part of the chapter, we explore one of the main turning points of the movement’s history, the call for the first Friday prayers in Madinah Saddam and a few other locations. We will also explore how the prayer was first implemented, quoting direct witnesses to it, and explore the contents of the first sermons by different preachers and the Regime’s reaction to it. A brief excursus on the history, background, and theological dimension of the Friday prayer in Shi’ism will also be provided. Secondly, we explore the expansion of the prayers to other locations in Iraq and another turning point in the movement’s history: Sadr’s decision to start leading the prayer himself in the Great Mosque of Kufa in April 1998. In this period, the prayers reached their maximum expansion. Thus, we try to analyze this expansion, mapping it and exploring the contents of *wukala*’s and Sadr’s sermons,⁸⁸ held between 1997 and 1999, that transmitted to a broader following of his ideas, highlighting themes in common and points of contact with Sadr’s more theoretical works. Sources, especially when dealing with Sadr’s and his agents’ sermons, will be presented thematically to avoid a long and tedious list of events. The thematic approach will allow us to focus on the crucial topics during Sadrist’s sermons.

⁸⁷ al-Šadr, Muḥammad Muḥammad Šādiq (1997). *Fiqh al- ‘Ašāir* (The Jurisprudence of the Tribes). Beirut: Dār al-Bašā’ir.

⁸⁸ al-Šadr, Muḥammad Muḥammad Šādiq (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma ‘ah li-Šahīd al-Šalāah al-Ġuma ‘ah* (The Friday Sermons of the Marthyr of the Friday Prayer). Beirut: Dār al-Bašā’ir.

Furthermore, to follow the development of the Prayers chronologically, we will provide tables with a list of all prayers, names of preachers, names of the mosques, and the number of participants. The tables are to be found in the annex section at the end of this work, along with maps of the geographical expansion of the Sadrist movement, which are also based on data from archival research. In the third section of the chapter, we investigate the diffusion of Sadrist thought during this period through means other than Friday prayers, like magazines, the organization of religious festivals, or the spread of Sadr's books and pamphlets. We also analyze an episode in which Sadr called for one of these religious festivities and was forced to withdraw his statements by the Regime and the consequences that this had on his followers. In the fourth section of the chapter, we analyze the Regime's surveillance and repression of the Friday prayers during this period. In this section, we also see how Sadr, in the Fall of 1998, started stepping up his criticism of the Regime and how this choice set him on a path of collision with the Ba'athist Regime. This chapter's fifth and last section explores the consequences of Sadr's criticism and clashes with the Regime. These choices set in motion the last significant change in the movement's history in the 1990s: Muhammad al-Sadr's assassination by the Ba'ath Iraqi Regime.

This chapter is based both on interviews and archive sources from the Ba'ath Party archive. Both sources provided rich, new, and more detailed information that revealed the events of this crucial period of Sadrism's development.

Fourth Part.

In the fourth chapter, we explore the consequences of Sadr's assassination, Sadr's followers' response, and the Regime's reaction. In the first section of this chapter, we explore the spontaneous demonstrations and revolts by Sadrist followers in protest of Sadr's assassination and the Regime's repression of these protests. In particular, we focus on the revolts that happened at Madina Saddam, which were the most significant. Nevertheless, revolts occurred in all major Sadrist centers, like al-'Ammārah (al-Ammara), al-Ḥayyāniyyah (al-Hayyaniyye) in Baṣrah (Basra), and Nāṣṣiriyyah (Nassiriyyah). No revolts took place in Najaf, as the Regime, before Sadr's assassination, had deployed troops in the city, fearing revolts after the planned assassination of Sadr. In the second section of the chapter, we will explore the second section of the Sadrist revolts, which consisted of a coordinated insurrection in different cities in southern and central Iraq, with expected

support from Iraqi Islamist groups in Iran. The revolt was quickly crushed by the Regime and opened the way for another phase of the revolts: a series of planned attacks against Ba'athist officials. The third section deals with this phase of the revolt and retraces some of the operations we could reconstruct through the interviews. This phase of the movement's reaction to Sadr's assassination is still relatively unknown and represents another interesting page of Sadrist history. Parallel to these revolts, Sadr's followers and representatives continued to spread Sadr's ideas through different means; the analysis of this cultural campaign is the topic of the fourth section of this chapter. Sadr's followers continued to spread Sadr's teachings by publishing books and flyers. In the fifth section of the chapter, we explore the continuation of Friday prayers after Sadr's death and the struggle to claim Sadr's legacy among the different currents within the movement.

As the previous one, this chapter is based on archival sources and interviews, providing new data on this crucial period of the movement's history that sets the base for the post-2003 development of Sadrism.

Conclusions.

In this section, we will try to summarize the different sections of the research, highlight the most important points, and connect them to give an overview of the conclusion on the history of the movement reached by this research work. We will also try to highlight some of the relevance of our results for the study of the Sadrist movement after 2003 and the significance of the findings for the study of opposition movements under Authoritarian Regimes. Furthermore, we will also highlight the results of connecting the history of the Sadrist movement to the more extended history of the Islamist movement in Iraq through Sadr's closeness to such environments in the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, we will also try to connect Sadr's work and Sadrist ideology to the debates in political Shi'ism in the second half of the 20th century. Finally, we will also try to show how studying the detailed processes and mechanisms of creation, development, and spread of sadrism can enrich our understanding of the movement.

1. First Part. Laying the Foundation for the Movement: the Conditions and Context for the Rise of Muhammad al-Sadr.

In this first part of the dissertation, we will investigate the conditions that made the rise of Muhammad al-Sadr and his movement possible. To do this, we will explore the period predating the beginning of the movement that is the object of this study, dwelling on a few topics that, according to our analysis, help us understand and contextualize the reasons for the rise of Sadrism in the 1990s. The phenomena we will explore have already been objects of study. Thus, we will only quickly highlight them, without an in-depth investigation, mentioning only those events that we consider pivotal in creating the conditions for the birth of Sadrism.

The events we will present here thus are the evolution of the debates of Shi'ism on authority and power and the development of the Shi'a Islamist movement in Iraq. Then, we will look at the construction by the Ba'athist Regime of a system of control over the Iraqi religious environment, the repression of the Iraqi Islamists in the late 1970s in connection with the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the War with Iran and its consequences on Islamism and control of religion in Iraq; the 1990 invasion of Kuwait and the 1991 Intifada; the UN Sanctions on Iraq; the death of al-Khoei in 1992 and the emergence of Sadr.

1.1 First Chapter: The Broader Historical Conditions for the Rise of Sadrism.

1.1.1 The Debates on Power and Authority in Shi'ism.⁸⁹

To properly understand the theoretical debates in which Sadr's work, and thus his claim to religious and political authority among the Shi'a, and the ideology of the Sadrist movement, we have to look at the broader temporal frame of the Shi'i debates on authority and power. These debates help us understand the context of Sadr's thought was part of and the debates he participated in. It is also important to look at these debates since Sadr, along with other scholars and leaders of the Shi'a Islamist movement in Iraq and the Middle East, referred to them when discussing leadership, state-building, and power issues. Thus, drawing a quick picture of such discourse is essential to contextualize intellectually the Shi'a Islamist movement in Iraq, of which Sadr is an integral part.

Dabashi, in his study on Shi'ism as a religion of protest and his study on authority in Islam, describes the Prophet Muhammad as a charismatic leader, following Weber's description of charisma.⁹⁰ After Muhammad's death, Dabashi explains how the Sunni Islam branch attempted to *routinize* the Prophet's charisma by first electing caliphs and then transmitting this power through royal succession.⁹¹ Shi'a, instead, tried to *reproduce* charisma by extending this prophetic quality to his family members. According to Dabashi, this approach brought the Shi'ism of the first centuries of Islam to be an oppositional and protest attitude, also connected with its minoritarian and subaltern position and led by

⁸⁹ In this work, as already quickly mentioned, we do not refer to this more extended debate in Shi'ism referring to an essentialized Shi'ism where all issues go back to a century-long discussion, connected with the origin of Islam and Shi'ism is a monolithic essence, not influenced by changes in history and society. Of course, it is influenced by changes in history and society, and the debates the Shi'a scholars hold are deeply rooted in the events they live in. Nevertheless, I think it is interesting to quickly reconstruct this more extended debate and the origin of the problem of authority in Islam and Shi'ism as, when Shi'a scholars debate these ideas, the background to which they refer explicitly is these very debates that have their roots in the first centuries of Islam and Shi'ism; implicitly, the context for these debates is given by the current historical events, as in the renewed interest in the question of authority opened at the end of the 19th century by European colonization, and, specifically, the Tobacco Revolt in Iran (1891).

⁹⁰ Dabashi, Hamid (1989). *Authority in Islam. From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads*. London: Transaction Publisher, p. 1. Dabashi (2011). *Shi'ism: a religion of protest*.

⁹¹ Dabashi (1989). *Authority in Islam*, p. 2.

charismatic leaders that could, through their charisma inherited by their family line, reclaim their connection to the Prophet.⁹²

Nevertheless, there was an ulterior split with the Shi'a community after the occultation. When the Prophet's family could not carry on the reproduction of charisma, and the line of Imams ended, there was an attempt to routinize this charisma also in Shi'ism. This attempt was made by *institutionalizing* the authority in Shi'ism, reproducing those characteristics of the Imams that could be passed down, knowledge of religion.

In this way, Shi'a scholars slowly became the Imams' representatives on Earth, gaining more and more prerogatives on the degree of authority they could exercise. At the same time, by supporting and recognizing as legitimate Shi'a earthly rulers, such as the Safavids dynasty and later on the Qajar,⁹³ the scholars started supporting more and more the *status quo* that granted them their powers and prerogatives, losing the initial concept of reproduction of charisma and rebellious characteristic of Imami Shi'ism, as highlighted by Dabashi. He states: *In a way, the disappearance of the Last Imam necessitates and facilitates the appearance of a scholastic tradition in Shi'ism in which the sanctity of the letter of the law became a simulacrum of the charismatic presence of the Shi'i imams.*⁹⁴

At the other end of the split, Dabashi identified Shi'a currents that tried to continue the reproduction of charisma at the heart of Shi'ism at the beginning of its existence.⁹⁵ Many scholars attest to the presence of this second current within Shi'ism: Linda Walbridge, in her study on the institution of the marja'iyyah, supports this theory; Mojan Momen does the same, along with Said Arjomand, Ali Shariati, and al-Simri, one of the biographers of al-

⁹² Ibid., pp. 5, 97, 98.

⁹³ *This de facto acceptance of the temporal power, needless to say, was in full agreement with the ancient Persian notion of the "sisterhood" of the religious and the state institutions, an interdependency perceived to be essential for the endurance of both institutions and the stability of the social order against the corrupting influence of "bad religion" (i.e., the antinomian, often messianic, alternatives to legalistic Shi'ism). While the state maintained peace and order, upheld the shari'a, defended the domain, and guarded the jurists' vested interests, the jurists were, in turn, expected to maintain good relations with the state, and even serve in the state-controlled judiciary. In this passage, we understand the relationship between the clerics and the state in Iran while also finding a reference to alternatives to legalistic Shi'ism. Amanat, Abbas (2003). From *ijtihad* to *wilayat-i faqih: The Evolving of the Shi'ite Legal Authority to Political Power*. Logos, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 4.*

⁹⁴ *Thus, centred around four canonical texts and a small gathering of revered old men, came together the moral vertebrae of an otherwise youthful charismatic of revolutionary defiance. Their white beards and black turbans hovering over blank papers and sharpened reeds, these ageing jurists became the sole indices of their brotherhood of juridical exactitude.* Dabashi (2011). *Shi'ism: a religion of protest*, p. 67.

⁹⁵ *Even within Shi'ism, itself a profoundly destabilizing force in Islamic history, there have been systematic and repeated break-ups between stabilizing and destabilizing tendencies, between those Shi'is who wanted to settle down and let go of their Prophet and Ali's charismatic memory and codify their respective legacies in enduring institutions of authority, and those who have insisted on perpetuating it.* Ibid., pp. 67, 68.

Sadr.⁹⁶ The groups that are part of this current that opposes scholasticism and institutionalization inside Shi'ism, at different points of its history, favored a militant and often millenarian approach to religion and politics.

The development of this institutionalization in Shi'ism started with the beginning of the occultation of Imam Mahdi (874), of which we shall talk more in-depth later on. However, it was only during the Safavid reign in Iran (1501 - 1736) that it began to be systematized. The growing ties between the clerics and the state brought the Shi'a clerics to find beneficial supporting the *status quo*, defending the privilege they gained by supporting the claims to religious legitimacy of the monarchy, and becoming overly interested in a legalistic and institutionalized approach to religion. Among the different legal schools in Shi'ism, the one that emerged for its support to the state was the Uṣūlī school (Usuli) during the 18th and 19th centuries, at the end of Safavid rule and during the Qajar's, thus defeating other rival currents even in terms of philosophical dominance. The main threat to Usuli came from the Aḥbārī (Akhbari) from another institutionalized Shi'a legal school. The difference between the two was given by the latter's insistence on a strictly literal interpretation of religious sources; the Usuli, instead, supported the use of *iṭṭihād* (ijtihād), independent rational reasoning, to read the Qur'an and the Sunna. The victory of this juridical school, with its focus on *ijtihād* and its ties to political power, opened the way to developing new institutions and new prerogatives for the clerics, supported by the interpretation of the Islamic Law guided by *ijtihād* and thus leaving more space for innovation. The need for religious sanctioning by the Qajar dynasty gave the clerics even more power. In the second half of the 19th century, the institution of the marja'iyya took shape.⁹⁷ This institution tried to reproduce religious knowledge, the only characteristic of the Imams' authority that could

⁹⁶ *The accounts of the lives of Musha'sha' and Nurbakhsh [in Shahzad Bashir's article] clarify the potential challenge to the role of the mujtahids as preservers of the tradition by men who claim direct access to divine power, and also account for the perennial tensions between the two paradigms of leadership so strongly expressed in Shi'ism: the messianic/heroic figure vs. the legalistic/ritualistic caretaker, a theme also relevant to the history of nineteenth-century Shi'ism.* Walbridge, Linda S. (2001). *The Most Learned of the Shi'a. The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid*, Oxford University Press, pp. 7, 8, 21. Momen, Moojan (2016). *Shi'a Islam: A Beginner Guide*. London: Oneworld Publications, p. 57. *This transformation [the one of Shi'ism to the national religion of Iran] swung the pendulum once more from chiliasm to law and to the hierocratic system of authority whose foundation was the nomocratic theology of the rationalist doctors of the eleventh century.* Arjomand, Said Amir (1996). *The Consolation of Theology: Absence of the Imam and Transition from Chiliasm to Law in Shi'ism.* The Journal of Religion, Vol. 76, No. 4, pp. 548 – 571, p. 571. Mervin and Mouline (2017). *Islam politiques*, p. 147. Shariati, Ali (1997). *Red Shi'ism: The Religion of Martyrdom. Black Shi'ism: The Religion of Mourning.* (<http://www.shariati.com/english/redblack.html>). al-Sīmī (2019) *Dawr al-Marja'iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 41.

⁹⁷ Mervin, Sabrina (2004). *Les Autorités religieuses dans le chiisme duodécimain contemporain.* Archives de sciences sociales des religions, 49e Année, No. 125, p. 66.

be replicated. The birth of this institution highlights the connections between institutionalized Shi'ism and this specific type of authority and its approach to politics in Shi'ism, in which religious knowledge is the most important criterion for religious leadership. The approach of defending the *status quo* was challenged by the Babi movement, which denied the jurists' role as the representatives of the Mahdi during his absence and reclaimed to follow the Imam directly. The first development of the institution of the marja'iyya and the choice of the first marja' as Šaiḥ Murtaḍā al-Anṣarī (Sheikh Murtaza al-Ansari) (1781 – 1864) in the late 1850s was probably also a response to the Babi movement and the community's need *for a clerical leadership committed to higher standards of morality, learning, and social justice*.⁹⁸ The Babi movement is often used as an example of the defiant current within Shi'ism, focusing more on charisma than on Jurists' authority.

Under the Qajar monarchy, the debate on the political role of the Shi'a clergy and the expansion of this authority was also pushed forward by the events of the Tobacco Revolt. In 1872, Šāh Nāṣir al-Dīn Qāğār (Shah Nasir al-Din Qajar) (1831 – 1896) sold a concession for developing banks, railroads, mining, and similar commerce to a British citizen, the Baron de Reuter. Protests from the popular Iranian opposition led to the cancellation of the concession. However, in 1890, the Shah sold a concession to a British company again, giving it a monopoly on tobacco commerce in Iran. The popular protest this time was led by the Shi'a clerics, in particular by Āyah Allāh Ḥassan al-Šīrāzī (Ayatollah Hassan al-Shirazi) (1815 – 1895), who published a *fatwa* against tobacco smoking. The widespread support and implementation of this prohibition and the clerics-led protest caused the Shah to cancel the concession in December 1891. The central role of the clergy and religious discourse, symbolism, and the tools of power of the clerics, such as the *fatwa*, marked this event as the beginning of Shi'a clerics' engagement in politics in the 20th century.⁹⁹

The leadership role of the Shi'a clerics and their use of religion for political purposes continued a few years later; after the assassination of Nasir al-Din in 1896, protests erupted in the country, calling for liberal reforms and agitating against European powers' intrusion in the country's affairs. These protests brought in 1906 to the fall of the Shah and the establishment of a National Consultative Assembly. Initially, the Shi'a clergy welcomed this news as they had a central role in the protests and expected the formation of a new state

⁹⁸ Amanat (2003). *From ijtihad to wilayat-i faqih*, p. 7. Mervin (2004). *Les Autorités religieuses dans le chiisme duodécimain contemporain*, p. 66.

⁹⁹ Esposito, John L. (1998). *Islam and Politics*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, pp. 86, 87.

closer to Islamic principles. Other components of the revolt did not agree, and disagreement ensued among the protesters, effectively blocking the work of the Consultative Assembly and bringing, thanks to the influence of Britain and Russia, a new Shah that was able to close the Assembly in 1908 and disband it totally in 1911. Even if short-lived, this experience shows the Shi'a clerics' interests and willingness to act in modern politics and assert their power, continuing thus the debates on the structure and kind of state the clerics should support, the cleric's prerogatives and their powers during the Major Occultation and the like.¹⁰⁰

Another step in this debate, often forgotten, took place in Iraq. The reconstruction of the origins of the political debates among Shi'a clergy usually focuses only on Iran due to the relevance of the 1979 revolution. Still, it was a shared process between Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon. Shi'a clerics moved between the borders of Middle Eastern countries quite often and have a transnational vocation, as we shall see looking at the history of the Sadr family; thus, looking at their debates only within the frame of a modern nation-state would be reductive, even if we still have to consider the different socioeconomic contexts that differ in areas of the region.

The event that took place in Iraq was the 1920 Great Iraqi Revolution (*al-Ṭawrah al-ʿIrāqīyya al-Kubrā*), in which the Shi'a 'ulama had a central role in mobilizing Iraqi Southern tribes against the British occupation, calling with a *fatwa* for a fight against the occupiers and showing again the central role of the clerics in mobilizing and politicizing peoples of Iraq and Iran, and their interest in having a political role.¹⁰¹

After the revolt, many 'ulamā' ('ulama) (scholars) were sent into exile to Iran, and thus, the political ferment in Iraq stopped for a while.¹⁰² Interest in politics grew once more at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, with the works of Muḥammad Ḥussayn Kāshif al-Ġiṭā' (Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita) (1877–1954) debating and denouncing imperialism and the occupation of Palestine.

From then on, Shi'a jurists started to claim more political authority, expanding their functions as the Imams' general deputies (*nowwāb al-ʿāmm*), claiming new aspects of *the messianic Imam's Wilaya* (rulership). Usually, clerics are only allowed to issue legal

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 88, 89.

¹⁰¹ Kadhim, Abbas (2012). *Reclaiming Iraq: The 1920 Revolution and the Founding of the Modern State*. Austin: University of Texas. Nadhmi, Wamidh J.O. (1974). *The Political, Intellectual and Social Roots of the Iraqi Independence Movement 1920*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Durham University, p. 377.

¹⁰² Machlis (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State," p. 5. Davis (2014). *Islamism, Authoritarianism, and Democracy*, p. 209.

opinions, adjudicate disagreements under the rubric of *qaḍā'* (judicial authority) in matters of *ḥisbiyyah* (limited authority), and assume trusteeship for those who need a guardian (*wilāyyah al-ḥāṣṣah*), such minors and the like. Nevertheless, a jurist's discretionary authority (*wilāyyah al-taṣarruf*), which includes the administration powers, is not traditionally allowed if not in certain moments and under certain conditions of need.¹⁰³ However, it is based on the clerics being the general deputies of the Imam that in the second half of the 20th century, the most critical positions for expanding clerical authority were based, developing different claims to *al-wilāyyah al-muṭlaqah* (absolute authority) or *al-wilāyyah al-'āmmah* (general authority).¹⁰⁴

From the 1950s, the debate on the clerics' role in politics and their prerogatives and the construction of an Islamic state spread among clerics, finding some of its most well-known theorists.

The most well-known probably is Ayatollah Khomeini's concept of *wilāyyah al-faqīh*. Relying on the theory of *al-niyābah al-'āmmah* (General Deputyship) or *al-wilāyyah al-'āmmah*,¹⁰⁵ usually assigned only to the Imams but claimed for the jurists as the deputies of the Imam, Rūḥollāh Ḥomeinī (Ruhollah Khomeini) (1902 - 1989), built his theory of government.¹⁰⁶ This position, even though it was based on the developments of the legalistic views of Shi'ism, presented some aspects of charismatic-messianic-militant leadership in the person of Khomeini and heavily drew on some aspects of the charismatic movement present

¹⁰³ Mavani, Hamid (2011). *Ayatullah Khomeini's Concept of Governance (wilayat al faqih) and the Classical Shi'i Doctrine of Imamate*. Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 47, No. 5, pp. 807-824, p. 810.

¹⁰⁴ Amanat (2003). *From ijtihad to wilayat-i faqih*, p. 9. Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).

¹⁰⁵ Mavani (2011). *Ayatullah Khomeini's Concept of Governance*, p. 815.

¹⁰⁶ *Ayatullah Khomeini first promulgated this concept during his 1970 series of Najaf (Iraq) lectures. Relying upon both rational and traditional proofs, he supported his case that during the messianic infallible Imam's prolonged occultation, the jurisconsult, by virtue of being his indirect deputy, has both the mandate and the responsibility not only to interpret Islamic rulings on matters of devotion and personal affairs, but also in the social realm, and to manage the state's affairs on behalf of the Imam.* Mavani (2011). *Ayatullah Khomeini's Concept of Governance*, p. 807.

The concept of wilaya upon which Khomeini propounded his theory is a complex and theologically charged one. Variably read as wilaya (authority, guardianship) and walaya (patron-client bond of friendship), for Shi'ites it was the hereditary status primarily arrogated to 'Ali and his Imam descendants as true successors to the Prophet; a status of sovereignty over his true believers. In Sufism, wilaya implied friendship with God, a saintly status of proximity to Truth, even according to some, on par with prophecy. For the Shi'ite jurists, wilaya was a purely legal term denoting the state of guardianship often assumed by the jurist over the legal minor (saghir) and mentally retarded (mahjur), hence wilaya al-faqih. Although, in theory, the guardianship of the jurist could be extended to the public sphere, in reality, no jurist of any substance considered viable the jurist's "authority to rule" (wilaya al-hukm). In the absence of the Occulted Imam, who is the just and legitimate enforcer of the wilaya, few jurists even condoned the "authority to judge" (wilaya al-qada) beyond mere issuance of fatwas, but without the necessary power to enforce them. The notion of "general deputyship" (niyaba 'amma) on behalf of the Imam, as claimed by some jurists in the Safavid and early Qajar periods, was never extended to the authority to govern, though it did reserve for the jurist certain prerogatives, such as declaring jihad under the auspices of the state. Amanat (2003). *From ijtihad to wilayat-i faqih*, p. 11.

throughout the history of Shi'ism.¹⁰⁷ The synthesis between the more institutionalized branch of Shi'ism and the more charismatic and mystic one is not new in Shi'a history, as highlighted by Said Arjomand in his reconstruction of the origins of the theory of the Imamate in the VIIIth and the XIth centuries.¹⁰⁸

Khomeini also drew on the works and ideas of Muḥammad al-Šīrāzī (Muhammad al-Shirazi) (1928 - 2001), who, as demonstrated by the work of Olivier Scharbrodt, was part of the social and intellectual milieu from which the theory of *wilāyyah al-faqīh* (wilaya al-faqih) emerged, thus criticizing the idea that Khomeini was the one and only inventor of this theory.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the theory proposed by Shirazi and his brothers and collaborators, Ḥassan (1935 – 1980) and Šādiq (1942 -), presented some differences from the Khomeinist vision of wilayat al-Faqih. These differences mainly focused on the fact that, while Khomeini saw at the head of the Islamic state only one clerical leader, the Shirazi network proposed a council of clerics.¹¹⁰ The cleric Muḥammad Taqī al-Mudarrīsī (Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi) (1945 -) was also part of the Shirazi network and nephew of the Shirazi brothers. In the 1970s, he would go on later to become the leader of the MAI (Munazamah al-‘Amal al-Islāmī) (Movement of Islamic Action), one of the Iraqi opposition groups exiled in Iran in the 1980s, and he was also involved in the debates on the different forms of clerical authority and government of the Islamic state.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Ainsi, à partir de 941, la communauté des croyants se retrouva sans guide, aussi bien pour les affaires spirituelles que pour les affaires temporelles. Selon le hadith chiite, «Toute bannière élevée avant le soulèvement du Qā'im appartient à un rebelle contre Dieu (taghut)», tout pouvoir politique était considéré comme inique, illégitime. Or, le temps passant, il devenait de plus en plus difficile, pour la communauté, de se passer d'autorité, de référence. Des questions centrales restaient sans réponse: à qui verser les impôts religieux ? Qui peut diriger la prière du vendredi ou lancer le jihad ? Qui détient le pouvoir de statuer, de juger, d'arbitrer les conflits et de faire appliquer les peines, en l'absence de l'imam ? Peu à peu, les oulémas procédèrent à une élaboration doctrinale, afin de s'attribuer les fonctions et les pouvoirs de l'imam, et d'agir en son nom en tant que son délégué (nā'ib al-imām). En outre, ils impulsèrent un processus de rationalisation, voire d'idéologisation des doctrines qui s'effectua par étapes successives, au moyen, notamment, de l'introduction de différents concepts clefs. C'est ce long processus qui allait permettre à Khomeini de concevoir sa théorie de wilayat al-faqih, « le pouvoir politico-charismatique » ou « guidance » du théologien-juriste, sur laquelle est fondé l'Etat islamique en Iran. Mervin (2004). *Les Autorités religieuses dans le chiisme duodécimain contemporain*, p. 65.

See also, Ashraf, Ahmad (1990). *Theocracy and Charisma: New Men of Power in Iran*. International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 113, 116. Ashraf describes Khomeini as a militant-charismatic figure who combined personal and office charisma.

¹⁰⁸ Arjomand (1996). *The Consolation of Theology*, pp. 570, 571.

¹⁰⁹ Scharbrodt, Oliver (2020). "Khomeini and Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī: Revisiting the Origins of the "Guardianship of the Jurisconsult" (*wilāyat al-faqīh*).” *Die Welt Des Islams*, Vol. 61, No. 1, pp. 1 – 30.

¹¹⁰ Matthiesen, Toby (2010). "Hizbullah al-Hijaz: A History of The Most Radical Saudi Shi'a Opposition Group.” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 2, pp. 179-197.

¹¹¹ Abdul Jabar, Faleh (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, pp. 250 – 252.

Nevertheless, within this debate on the authority of the jurists, the Khomeinist position was not wholly without critics, especially outside Iran. For instance, Ayatollah al-Khu'i (1899 – 1992) did not support Khomeini's theory of *wilāyyah al-faqīh*.¹¹² Al-Khu'i followed the *wilāyyah al-hāṣṣah* so that the jurists had a right to govern but only over certain subjects who could not fend for themselves. Al-Khu'i believed sovereignty belonged to the ummah (the Islamic nation) and not the jurists. He did not support an extended authority of the jurists out of the *ḥisbiyyah*, approving only the use of *al-wilayah al-tassaruf* in cases such as the 1991 Intifada, where he took the lead of the committee governing Najaf in the absence of the Regime. His disciple Ali al-Sistani also endorsed this view.¹¹³ Al-Khu'i tried to keep his distance from politics in Iraq and Iran before and after the revolution.¹¹⁴ Also, in the 1991 Intifada, al-Khu'i only called for rebels to respect private property and established a council of jurists to supervise the affairs of the faithful, showing a limited approach to clerical involvement in politics, connected with his support for *wilāyyah al-hāṣṣah*. The portrait painted by Yassin al-Jibouri of Ayatollah al-Khu'i also gives the impression of a moderate opposer of Saddam's Regime, who tried not to comply with Saddam's co-optation of Shi'a religious establishment but at the same time never took direct and robust action against the Regime.¹¹⁵

Alternatively, Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr (Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr) (1935 – 1980), a prominent thinker and symbolical leader of the Da'wa Party, proposed a systematization of the institution of the marja'iyya by creating an objective marja'iyya.¹¹⁶ As there were no clear parameters for choosing the marāḡa' (pl. of marja'),¹¹⁷ Baqir wanted to find some objective criteria to decide who should be a marja' and not base everything on personal networks and characteristics. He also developed a government and Islamic state theory where the jurists would have a consultive role, and he defined this concept as *wilāyyah al-*

¹¹² AL-KHOEI, YŪSUF (1999). *ABŪ 'L-QĀSIM AL-ḤŪ'Ī*. Oriente Moderno, Anno 18, Vol. 79, No. 2, pp. 491 – 500, pp. 493, 494, 492.

¹¹³ Mavani (2011). *Ayatullah Khomeini's Concept of Governance*, p. 811.

¹¹⁴ AL-KHOEI (1999). *ABŪ 'L-QĀSIM AL-ḤŪ'Ī*, pp. 493, 494.

¹¹⁵ Al-Jibouri, Yassin T. (1992). "A Brief Biography in Memory of His Late Holiness Aytullah al-Uzma Sayyid Abul-Qasim al-Khui." *Noor al-Islam Magazine* (<https://www.al-islam.org/articles/brief-biography-memory-his-late-holiness-ayatullah-al-uzma-sayyid-abul-qasim-al-khui-yasin>), pp. 12, 13. Ashraf states that al-Khoi was overtly critical of the State. Ashraf (1990). *Theocracy and Charisma* p. 119. Also, Sakai defines al-Khoei as *mostly apolitical*, even if this is a difficult category to use. Sakai (2003). *The 1991 Intifada in Iraq*, p. 168.

¹¹⁶ Mallat, Chibli (1993). *The renewal of the Islamic Law: Muḥammad Baqer al-Ṣadr; Najaf and the Shi'i International*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 66.

¹¹⁷ Mervin (2004). *Les Autorités religieuses dans le chiisme duodécimain contemporain*, p. 67 68.

ummah.¹¹⁸ Baqir al-Sadr had a similar vision to that of al-Khu'i, in general, but was more committed to the involvement of clerics in politics and to the expansion of their prerogatives, similar to Shirazi.¹¹⁹

Muhammad al-Sadr thus entered into the debate on clerical authority and authority in Shi'ism in general, which had been going on since the beginning of the Major Occultation and had peaked in the 20th century with the debates between Khomeini, Baqr al-Sadr, and figures like them.

Sadr states his support for Khomeini's theory of "Guardianship of the Jurists," widening the prerogatives of the *muḡtahid* (mujtahid), based on which he will later call for the reinstitution of the communal Friday prayers, as we will see.¹²⁰ At the same time, he distinguishes himself from Khomeini's theories. He tries to avoid a direct connection with Iran and the Iranian-Khomeinist model in two ways; in the first place, Sadr claims that he has *wilaya* on Iraq, separating it from Iran almost on a geographical basis¹²¹ and claiming that the Iranian people had chosen this model for them. However, the Iraqis had not done so yet,¹²² suggesting a decisive role of society, according to him, in determining the model of government. Sadr furthermore continues to develop this bottom-up approach by stating, in his research on the "Guardianship of the Jurist," that when this model can not be applied because of particular historical circumstances and a qualified jurist can not take power, this cleric should try to spread Islam in society.¹²³

In this way, society would be Islamized from below and transform the circumstances that previously prevented the qualified cleric from taking the role of the leading jurist in

¹¹⁸ Mallat (1993). *The renewal of the Islamic Law*, pp. 70, 82. Hadad, Sama (2006). *The Development of Shi'ite Islamic Political Theory*. American Enterprise Institute, pp. 32 – 40.

¹¹⁹ Machlis (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State," p. 10.

¹²⁰ Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*. Harling seems to point to a stronger connection between Muhammad al-Sadr's thoughts and Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's thought. As we shall see, Baqir al-Sadr connected with Muhammad al-Sadr and even wrote the introduction to one of his significant works, *The Encyclopedia of Imam Mahdi*, but in the debate on *wilaya*, the two stood on different positions. Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, pp. 372, 373. However, we agree with Hasan's opinion that Sadr was closer to Khomeini's vision of *wilaya al-faqih*, developed with specific differences. Machlis also points to a connection with Khomeini but does not differentiate the fine points of disagreement between the two as Hasan does. Machlis (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State," p. 11.

¹²¹ Harling, (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*. Harling argues that the geographical distinction made by Sadr is based on the conception of *al-wilaya al-khassa*, as this circumscribes the authority of a jurist to a specific geographical area. As we have seen before, this is not the meaning of *al-wilaya al-khassa*, which limits the authority of a jurist, but not geographically. Nevertheless, it is true what Harling says by stating that Sadr gave a *nationalist anchoring* to its movement. However, we think that the nationalist anchoring came more from the historical context and Sadr's focus on the Iraqi Shi'a community and their conditions, as this focus was the very reason for the widespread support he gained among the Iraqi Shi'a, rather than a legal category.

¹²² Interview with Ali al-'Ebadi, Baghdad (27/05/2024). Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

¹²³ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 373.

society, making society Islamic,¹²⁴ and, thus, the formation of an Islamic government would become inevitable.¹²⁵ The Islamisation of society would also represent the precondition for the return of the Mahdi, to which the Islamic government of the Jurists would just be a preparatory step.¹²⁶

The attempt to Islamize society by a qualified jurist who can not take power is the actual strategy that Sadr ended up using during the 1990s, as we shall see.

Sadr distinguished himself from other theorists debating the limits of the clerics' authority by discussing the characteristics that a cleric should embody to represent the Imams politically, so claiming *wilayat mutlaqa* and claiming to be, thus, the "qualified jurists."

Sadr stated that religious knowledge, as the only transmittable characteristic of the Imams' charisma, is insufficient for clerics to claim to be their political representatives. He noted that jurists to assert this authority should not only be knowledgeable in religion but also be in touch with their communities, share their conditions, have an active and militant approach to religion and the spread of Islam, be a pious, humble, modest yet courageous, selfless example to follow on the path to hasten the Mahdi's return and close to God and the Imams with mystical knowledge.¹²⁷ It is not a case that rumors were spread about Sadr being the Mahdi.¹²⁸ In a word, Sadr tried to propose a charismatic model of clerical leadership to claim the Imams' authority. The importance of the personal example and the active and

¹²⁴ Al-Sadr, Muhammad (1971), *Mabḥaṭ Wālayyah al-Faqīh* (Research on the Guardianship of the Jurist). Qom: Mu'assasah Mudin li-l-Taba'a wa-l-Naṣr. Sadr published his research on the Guardianship of the Jurists in 1971, well before he had any opportunity to cooperate with the Regime, here we see thus traces of his idea of spreading Islam in society before any move on political power well before the 1990s.

¹²⁵ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 373.

¹²⁶ In this passage from the *Encyclopaedia of the Mahdi*, Sadr explains how only the Mahdi can be the true leader of the Islamic Umma. *At every movement, there must be a leader; as every country has a president. Every successful movement in history had an experienced and brave leader to guide it [...] If this movement, in particular, tried to reform the entire world and bring justice for all humanity [...] there is the need for a qualified leader; that can take the reins of this reform on the day of return, and this is the Mahdi, peace be upon him.* al-Ṣadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, p. 145.

In the second extract, Sadr makes evident the connection between the authority of the Prophet, that of the Imams, and finally of the Mahdi: *The call of the prophet is universal, and his responsibilities are complex. Therefore, God gave the prophet the full ability to cope with such problems. [...] From this evidence, we get the idea that the Mahdi must have the same abilities, precisely as the twelve infallible imams, as successors of the prophet. Thus, all Muslims recognize that the Mahdi has the qualities for this global leadership and has such strength that he can deal with his responsibilities of bringing full justice to the world and implementing the complete just thesis of God.* Ibid., p. 148.

He was hinting that he himself was the leading imam of the nation as long as he was able to perform the Friday prayer. al-Sīmri (2019) *Dawr al-Marḡa'īyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 88. Al-Simri proposes the idea that Sadr proposed himself as the Imam as long as he was able to perform the Friday prayer. This would solve the problem of understanding who should lead the community while the Imam is absent and thus his critique of other kinds of leadership.

¹²⁷ Harling, (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*. Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, pp. 367, 372.

¹²⁸ Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*. Mervin (2004). *Les Autorités religieuses dans le chiïsme duodécimain contemporain*.

militant approach to Sadr's leadership model is also noticed by al-Ta'i, who speaks of Sadr's *originality of a personal revolutionary jurisprudence expressed through his performances*.¹²⁹

In this way, Sadr reconnected his positions with those expressed by the charismatic and revolutionary movements of the history of Shi'ism,¹³⁰ which were trying to reproduce Prophetic and Imams' charisma, expressing a synthesis between the institutionalized Shi'ism of the clerics and the marja'iyya with the charismatic tradition that had already taken place in Khomeini's approach, but in Sadr is even more explicit.¹³¹ In this way, we see another case of synthesis, such as the one highlighted by Arjomand that we already quoted.

Sadr's positions on the prerogatives of clerics and their characteristics are connected and rooted in the long debate in Shi'ism about clerics' power. At the same time, his positions are also influenced by the historical events he lived through, such as the repression of the Islamist movement by the Ba'ath party, which probably led him to theorize the necessity of Islamizing society first, given the impossibility of taking political power directly, as we shall see in the following sections.

1.1.2 The Iraqi Islamist Movement and Tolerated Opposition.

Within these debates and as a consequence of the socioeconomic and political change in the country, the Islamist movement also started emerging in the country and the Shi'a milieu throughout the 1950s. This emersion was part of a longer process that probably had its origins, at least for the 20th century, in the aforementioned 1920 Great Iraqi Revolution

¹²⁹ al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 461.

¹³⁰ al-Simri proposes that Sadr's project has its roots in Shi'a revolutionary history and has the basis in its revolutionary jurisprudence for total change. al-Sīmrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marḡa'iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 41.

¹³¹ Al-Simri supports the idea that the revolutionary discourse of Khomeini formed an initial field on which a revolution could be based, but Sadr proposed an alternative in political terms, according to al-Simri: *Outside Iraq, there was Imam Khomeini's discourse, which differed in its general tendencies and revolutionary character; and with this difference, it - Khomeini's discourse - formed an initial field to benefit from it to establish his [Sadr's] own discourse*. al-Sīmrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marḡa'iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 47. The defense of the marja'iyya by Sadr highlights the fact that his attempt at reform is not an antinomian one, as many other millenarist revolts. He is interested in downplaying the scholastic aspects of Shi'ism, but Sadr never denies the importance of Shi'a institutions and Islamic Law. Bashir gives an example of a similar approach to messianism in his work on Muhammad Bin Falah Muṣa'ṣa's messianic movement. In his article, Bashir points out how Muṣa'ṣa' takes a strong interest in the return of the Mahdi and the esoteric aspects of it, but at the same time, stresses the importance of strictly following Islamic Law. Bashir (2001). *Messianic Leadership in Late Medieval Shi'ism*, p. 38.

and the events in Iran. The period of quietism and detachment from politics due to the deportation to Iran of some clerics who had joined and called for revolt in 1920 ended in the second half of the 1940s, with the work of the already mentioned Muhammad Hussein Kashif al-Ghita. This process reached a turning point with the foundation of the Hizb al-Da'wa (1959), the first Iraqi Shi'a Islamist party. This party was created by a group of young clerics – among them Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Mahdī al-Ḥakīm, Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ḥakīm, and a group of lay Shi'a with previous experience in the Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr, chief among them Muḥammad Hādī al-Subaytī (1930-1988).¹³² The marja'iyya had a complex relationship with involvement in politics. It had so far refrained from sustaining the development of Islamist parties as this would push the rulers of Iraq – the Ottomans before, the British, the Hashemite Monarchy, and the successive Regimes then – to suppress the institution and their relative economic stability and independence deriving from this economic stability, based on religious taxes, *waqfs* and pilgrimage to the holy cities.¹³³ Thus, the formation of the Hizb al-Da'wa was only partially supported by the marja'iyya. It was pushed forward by the fear of the growing Iraqi Communist Party and its growing influence and attraction on the Shi'a population of Iraq. It was the fruit of a long series of formations of groups and associations, such as Muatadā al-Naṣr (The Publication Forum), Ġamā'ah al-'Ulamā' (The Scholar Group/Association), al-Ḥizb al-Ġa'farī (The Jafarite Party), that aimed to fight colonialism, limit the diffusion of secularist ideas in Iraqi society, and spread Islam, finally taking the form of a political party only at the end of the 1950s.¹³⁴

The Party grew in the 1960s,¹³⁵ but started to be repressed almost immediately after the second coming to power of the Ba'ath party in July 1968. During the 1970s, the Da'wa party faced intense repression from the Ba'ath, which had the objective of completely eliminating the party. During the 1970s, as part of an intra-clerical struggle between the two religious centers of Najaf and Karbala, and for political divergencies, another group emerged to represent Shi'a Islamism in Iraq: the MAI (Movement for Islamic Action). This organization was created by the circles close to the Shirazi and Mudarrisi, of whom we already spoke in connection to the development of the theory of *wilayah al-faqih*.

¹³² Laval, Thiabud (2023). *L'appel de la révolution: Origines, formation et expansion du parti al-Da'wa al-islāmiyya en Iraq (1948-1981)*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation.

¹³³ Davis (2014). *Islamism, Authoritarianism, and Democracy*, p. 208.

¹³⁴ For a detailed discussion of this process, see the work of Laval (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*.

¹³⁵ Abdul-Halim al-Ruhaimi, "The Da'wa Islamic Party: Origins, Actors, and Ideology," in Faleh A. Jabar (ed.), *Ayatollahs, Sufis, and Ideologues: State, Religion and Social Movements in Iraq*, London: Saqi Books, 2002, p. 155.

During the first years of the Hizb al-Da'wa, the Islamist movement involved itself with the newly established Iraqi Regime headed by General 'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim (Abd al-Karim Qasem) (1914 – 1963), who remained in power from 1958 to 1963. The Regime had a leftist orientation, especially at its establishment and during the first two years of its government. It was strongly supported by the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), which was, at the time, one of the most significant Iraqi political forces. The new Regime pushed for the introduction of a new personal status law (1959) and an agrarian reform to redistribute land (1958), which the ICP strongly supported.

These two laws faced fierce opposition from segments of Iraqi society. On the one hand, the law on land redistribution damaged the interests of the Iraqi landowners, many of whom owned lands in southern and central Iraq, were Shi'a and among the leading economic supporters of the marja'iyya and the hawza in Najaf through religious taxes and *waqf* endowments.

On the other hand, the first law, deemed by the clerics in Najaf unIslamic, damaged the clerics' interests and went against their worldview. When thus, the Qasem regime decided in 1960 to persecute the Communists, afraid of their growing power, and after some revolts and massacres led by the ICP members and sympathizers, the clerics were ready to bless the effort, led by the first division of the Iraqi Army, led by Ḥamīd al-Ḥaṣṣūna (1915 – 1986), son of a prominent landowning family from Nassiriyya. This effort was even endorsed with the publishing of a *fatwa* by Muḥsīn al-Ḥakīm (Muhsin al-Hakim) (1889 – 1970), the most important marja' of the time and higher representative of the Shi'a establishment, that declared Communism as being atheist and an infidel movement (*al-Šiyū'iyyah Kafr wa Ilhād*). The *fatwa* was made public by one of al-Hakim's students wishing a more active role for the marja'iyya in the fight against Communism and without al-Hakim's consent; however, the *fatwa* still affected the public opinion regarding Communism, marking, along with the Qasem repression campaign, the beginning of the end of the ICP power.¹³⁶ In 1961, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, also as part of the clerics' effort against Communism, published his work *Iqtisādunā* (Our Economy),¹³⁷ a ponderous treaty on Islamic economics and a critique of capitalism and Communism. The latter was strongly criticized, and among the tenets of the proposed Islamic economics system, Baqir al-Sadr also posed private property,

¹³⁶ Laval (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*, pp. 78 – 102.

¹³⁷ Baqir, Muhammad al-Sadr (1981). *Iqtisaduna: Dirasa mawdu'iyya tatanawalu bial-naqd wa-al-bahth al-madhahib al-iqtisadiyya li-al-mariksiyya wa-al-ra'smaliyya fi ususiha al-fikriyya wa-tafasiliha*. Beirut: Dar al-Ta'arf li-al-Matbu'at.

defending it vigorously. This defense was undoubtedly in line with the interests of the landowner financing the hawza, and that represented the more conservative wing of the Qasem Regime;¹³⁸ in February 1963, the Qasem Regime fell to an internal coup and a new and more conservative Regime was established in Iraq from 1963 to July 1968, led first by ‘Abd al-Salām ‘Ārif (1921 – 1966) and then by his brother, ‘Abd al-Raḥman ‘Ārif (1916 – 2007). During this period, the Ba’athists, who at the time were one of the political forces in Iraq struggling for supremacy – that they reached in July 1968 – used the *fatwa* again as a propaganda weapon against the Iraqi Communists, against whom they launched a terrible repression campaign that brought to the death of large numbers of ICP members, among them also the party secretary general, Salām ‘Ādil (1924 – 1963).

In this period of turmoil between the end of the Hashemite monarchy and the beginning of the Ba’ath Regime in 1968, we see how different Regimes in power used Iraqi Islamists and clerics to serve their interests and, in turn, the clerics and the Islamists tried to use the different Regimes to further their goals, such as the fight against Communism, the opposition to the new personal status law and the land reform law, defending their interests and those of their patrons. They did so by allying themselves with members of the Qasem Regime – the relationship between the marja’iyya and Qasem himself quickly deteriorated – and the Ba’ath party, the first who were deemed to be too secular and the second who would become the most ferocious oppressor of the Iraqi Islamist movement. This example shows how the interpretative lens of *power, social prominence, and pragmatism* are the correct prism to use to read politics in the hawza and how, already in this situation, the clerics show some traits of an opposition that is ready to cooperate with a regime when their interests align.

1.1.3 The Ba’ath Regime and the Control of Religion in Iraq.

Since its definitive seizure of power in July 1968, emerging victorious from the period of struggle between different political forces and turmoil, the Ba’ath Party soon developed a keen interest in controlling the Iraqi religious milieu.¹³⁹ Even before the Ba’ath’s rise to power, the religious environment had been a hotbed for political, and potentially opposing, movements, and thus, controlling it was a central piece in the Ba’ath policies within the

¹³⁸ Abisaab, Rula Jurdi and Abisaab, Malek (2014) *The Shi’ites of Lebanon. Modernism, Communism, and Hizbullah’s Islamists*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, pp. 95 – 99.

¹³⁹ Laval, (2023). *L’appel de la révolution*, p. 309.

country. The strategy deployed by the Regime presented a mix of repression and attempts to coopt religious actors and activists while trying to infiltrate this milieu and spread an interpretation of Islam that would serve the Regime's interest. These interpretations came from the approach to religion that had already been conceived by Mīšīl 'Aflaq (Michel Aflaq) (1910 – 1989), the founder and ideologue of Ba'athism, but had developed in the peculiar Iraqi context and response to historical events during the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁴⁰

The infiltration and attempts to control the religious environment became even more structured and ruthless once Ṣaddām Ḥussaiyn (1937 – 2006) seized power in July 1979.¹⁴¹ Especially after the beginning of the 1980s, when much of the Islamist opposition was forced into exile, mainly in Iran, and operated from there, the Regime's efforts moved more toward controlling the religious environment in Iraq rather than just repressing it, of course, without stopping to do so throughout Saddam's presidency.

During the March 1979 meeting of the High National Security Council (al-Maḡlis al-Ā'la lil-Aman al-Waṭanī/al-Qawmī), shortly before Hussein's rise to power, guidelines were set for the Ba'ath to try and control the religious environment in Iraq, especially among the Shi'a of Iraq.¹⁴² The Ba'ath thus started a systematic infiltration of mosques in Iraq by their agents to slowly take control of the religious environment.¹⁴³

To infiltrate and take control of the religious milieu, the Ba'ath, and in particular, the High National Security Council, deployed different strategies. The general idea behind these different tools of pressure was that the Regime did not only repress problematic elements but also wanted to find those who could help control religion, using it to legitimize the Ba'athist rule.¹⁴⁴ In fact, the Regime did not wish to displace pre-existing religious institutions but wanted to control them and exploit their legitimacy.¹⁴⁵

When Hussein came to power, thanks to the repression campaigns of the 1970s and many confessions from prisoners, the Ba'ath already had a good amount of knowledge of the Islamists in Iraq, which allowed it to deal an almost fatal blow to Islamists organizations inside Iraq during the repression campaign of 1979-1980.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, it was only after 1979 that reports on religious activism in Iraq started becoming more standardized, and we

¹⁴⁰ Faust, Aaron M. (2015). *The Ba'athification of Iraq. Saddam Hussein's Totalitarianism*. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 59, 60, 61.

¹⁴¹ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 73.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 63, 64.

¹⁴⁶ Laval (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*, p. 309.

found an effort to map comprehensively the Iraqi religious milieu.¹⁴⁷ These efforts aimed to understand who were the religious leaders still present in Iraq, who the different groups were, who their followers were, where they were located, their activities, infiltrating their organizations, and possibly trying to control them. This mapping meant having lists of religious men, their backgrounds, and their families. Similarly, this was done with all kinds of religious activism, even those who were not members of any Islamist group.¹⁴⁸

In order to do so, the Ba'ath created committees for religious awareness all over the country. These committees were used to control all trends of religiousness all over Iraq by holding obligatory meetings with religious men led by people loyal to the Regime. In these meetings, religious topics were discussed to find people's positions; topics for Friday sermons were also discussed, giving all sermon-givers a Regime-dictated sermon that would transmit the Regime's vision on religion.¹⁴⁹

At the same time, the Regime tried to take control of mosques and Ḥussayniyyāt (pl. of Ḥussayniyyah – building used in Shi'a religious ceremonies), as they saw them as the key places for Shi'a religiosity.¹⁵⁰ The Regime brought almost all mosques under the control of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, expanding its prerogatives, funding, and personnel, hiring only people personally loyal to Saddam – the minister became 'Abd Allāh Fāḍil (1941 – 1999), a loyal man of Saddam – and trying to make the mosques and their preachers dependent on state financing.¹⁵¹ In 1981, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments was even incorporated into the Presidential Office, signaling the centrality of controlling religion in Iraqi politics. The Regime also published lists of all people allowed to read the Qur'an or recite religious chanting in the Hussayniyyat, pushing them to support the Regime in their preachings and condemn Iran, especially after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Other than mapping mosques and Hussayniyyat, making lists, and creating dependency on the Regime for the authorizations for religious men to preach, the Regime also tried to take control of the religious environment by bringing every ceremony within

¹⁴⁷ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 73.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 38, 39.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 60. In an interview with Hajj Q. Qasim al-Swehili, he recalled how the family mosque, al-Hikmah mosque, in Madina Saddam was taken under Regime control during the 1980s. Interview with Hajj Q. Q. by phone (29/04/2024).

¹⁵¹ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, pp. 37, 38, 46. Laval (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*, pp. 310 – 321. 'Abd Allāh Fāḍil was minister of Religious Affairs from 1982 to 1993. Kadhimi (2013). *The Hawza Under Siege*, p. 32. A booklet was published to publicize the Regime's efforts to finance the hawza and Saddam's donations to the sanctuaries in Najaf and Karbala.

very clear limits and rules, all established by the Regime itself, of course. For instance, loudspeakers were banned from readings and prayers to limit the number of people attending the ceremonies, as only a few could listen without loudspeakers. Large gatherings altogether were banned, as happened in 1977 for the pilgrimage of *Arbaʿīn* (Arbaʿin – the celebration forty days after ʿĀšūrāʾ), as these moments were often the beginning of uprisings or demonstrations, catalyzing anti-regime sentiments.¹⁵²

The Regime had to have loyal religious scholars at its service to infiltrate, control, and take hold of the religious milieu. To reach this objective, it deployed two strategies: on the one hand, it tried to form new religious scholars from Baʿathists or loyal citizens; on the other, it tried to enroll already-formed religious scholars.

The Regime created new institutions for forming religious men in Iraq, such as the “Institute for the Preparation of Imams and Sermon-Givers” to form loyal religious men.¹⁵³ The Baʿath also inherited from the long Iraqi religious traditions institutions already in place that tried to exploit them to educate loyal religious men; it also organized commissions to control these institutions and ensure that the education provided was in line with the party interest and vision of Islam.¹⁵⁴ When already existing institutions could not be easily controlled, the Regime tried to shut them down or at least hinder their work, as it did with the hawza in Najaf and Karbalāʾ, trying to diminish the number of students and closing down religious schools in the two holy cities and banning foreign students.¹⁵⁵ At the same time, students in the seminars in Najaf and Karbala were being selected and educated by the Regime, which was trying to admit only students that could be loyal to the Regime and indoctrinate them, send them to the hawza and then use them as spies on other students and

¹⁵² Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 58.

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp. 92, 93.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 37, 83.

¹⁵⁵ First: Najaf - the only school in the province is al-Khoei's school with two classes; the first consists of 300 students and the second 150 students. There is another, inactive, school, named the Najaf Religious University with approximately fifteen students. Most of the aforementioned students are foreign (Iranians, Afghanis, Indians, and Pakistanis). The Arabs are mostly Lebanese and Saudis—lectures are delivered by several religious scholars at al-Tusi Mosque and Albu Sharba Mosque. Second: Karbalaʾ—It does not have any school, except for three individuals belonging to al-Khoei's school. They attend the lectures of his representative—Ridha al-Safi—at a mosque in Karbalaʾ. These devastating numbers represent a result of the relentless Baʿthist onslaught on the religious schools and their students, that included a combination of deportations and reductions of residence permits of foreign students, as well as the military conscription and arrests that were faced by the Iraqi students. In many cases, Iraqi students were tortured and executed as a repressive measure and to deter others from joining the religious schools. Kadhimi (2013). *The Hawza under Siege*, p. 28. Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, pp. 83, 84. The number of clerics diminished from nine thousand in the 1970s to two thousand in the 1980s and 800 right before the 1991 uprising. Yamao, Dai (2008). *Transformation of the Islamic Daʿwa Party in Iraq: from the revolutionary period to the Diaspora Era*. Asian and African Area Studies, N. 7, Vol. 2, pp. 238 – 267, pp. 247-248.

spread the Ba'athist approach to religion.¹⁵⁶ Exams were also implemented to ensure that only authorized clerics could work in mosques and Hussayniyyat.¹⁵⁷

However, time was required to form these religious men; thus, while new clerics were being formed, only some Ba'athists had permission to work in Religious affairs.¹⁵⁸ These were very few in numbers as most Ba'athists were secularists and had little interest or knowledge of religion, even if Saddam Hussein tried to push party members to become involved with religion, depicting it as a party duty.¹⁵⁹ Another consequence of the fact that it took time to form new clerics was that many mosques were left without preachers or that Sunni preachers were appointed to Shi'a mosques but never showed up.¹⁶⁰

However, these strategies were mainly focused on low-level clerics, while the Regime also needed to attract and control more influential ones.¹⁶¹ To do this, the Regime tried to convince influential clerics by promising collaboration rewards and advantages. For instance, in 1983, the Popular Islamic Conference was organized in Baghdad, and several important clerics, both Sunni and Shi'a, were invited and promised rewards in money and posts within the Ba'athist Religious system.¹⁶²

Nevertheless, all influential Shi'a clerics in Iraq refused, as the Regime required a payback for these rewards: loyalty to the Regime, condemnation of Iran, and religious justification for the Regime's politics. Furthermore, many of these clerics had members of their families imprisoned or killed by the Regime and were not ready to forget it.¹⁶³ Only some minor clerics agreed, and their sanction of the Regime's politics was more symbolic than effective.¹⁶⁴

Other methods were also used to coerce clerics into cooperation, or at least compliance, with the Ba'ath. The Regime tried to build an economic dependency on the

¹⁵⁶ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 65.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 37, 38. The exam was instituted in 1981 with the "The Service in Charitable and Religious Institutions" Law.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁵⁹ Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza Under Siege*, p. 33. Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, pp. 87, 89, 91.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 37, 38. In an interview with Sayyid A., he recalled that during the early 1990s, the Regime had sent a Sunni preacher, Muḥammad Yāsīn al-Ġibūrī, to manage and lead the prayers in the al-'Akīlāt (Ekilat) mosque in a mainly Shi'a area. Thus, nobody was attending his prayers. Interview with Sayyid Kadhim A., Kadhimiyyah (19/06/2024).

¹⁶¹ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 43.

¹⁶² Ibid., pp. 44, 45.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 43, 44. 'Alī Kāšif al-Ġiṭā' decided to try to take advantage of the Regime's offerings. He came from a prestigious Shi'a scholars' family, we have mentioned Muhammad Hussain Kashif al-Ghita, but he was not a known scholar himself. Thus, his efforts to support the Regime did not have much consequences.

government,¹⁶⁵ especially for the Shi'a, who, having a particular religious tax, the *hums* (khums), enjoyed a more autonomous economic status. Furthermore, the hawza also had access to the *awqāf* (pl. of *waqfs* – religious endowments) that had cumulated in time, providing another source of revenue, and the stream of pilgrims to the Iraqi holy cities and sanctuaries also provided revenues for the hawza and Shi'a clerics. The Regime acted upon all these sources, trying to cut them, seizing the *awqaf*, denying access to Iraq to pilgrims, and making the Shi'a religious establishment dependent upon financing by the government.¹⁶⁶

These mixed approaches permitted a good penetration and control of the religious milieu by the Ba'ath Regime,¹⁶⁷ but still, even after all the efforts, the Ba'ath remained short of loyal senior clerics, especially among the Shi'a, and still had very few formed new loyal clerics.¹⁶⁸ Most relevant supporters of the Regime in this field were Sunni, and even if the Regime theoretically supported an anti-sectarian approach to religion, these clerics still had a powerful anti-Shi'a position, as did the Ba'athists' expert in religion.¹⁶⁹

Where this system of control could not reach, the Regime employed more direct methods, such as imprisonment and assassinations. The waves of repression against Islamists worked parallelly to the attempt to infiltrate and control religion in Iraq since the seizure of power by the Ba'ath. In particular, the direct repression was aimed at Iraq's Islamist movements. Special attention, also in this case, was given to Iraqi Shi'a.

Among the various movement activities in the Shi'a milieu in the 1960s and 1970s in Iraq, as we have already seen, we find the MAI and, of course, the most important and more active, the Hizb al-Da'wa. Since the definitive seizure of power by the Ba'ath in 1968, the Regime had tried to erase the presence of the Da'wa with successive waves of repression, the first between 1971 and 1974 and the second between 1977 and 1980.

The repression started with an attack on the marja'iyya on May 13, 1969, following a speech by Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim condemning the arrestation of hundreds of Iranian pilgrims in the context of a quarrel with Iran over the Iranian support to the Kurdish militias and a border crisis between Iran and Iraq.¹⁷⁰ The speech also criticized the Regime for

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁶⁶ [T]he regime itself began supporting the hawza financially and thus attempted to "reduce their dependency" on foreign funds (especially from Iran). Ibid., pp. 39, 64. Wiley, Joyce N. (1992). *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, p. 58.

¹⁶⁷ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 45.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 89, 90, 91.

¹⁷⁰ Wiley (1992). *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as*, p. 46.

making the colonialists' interests and supporting the oppression of Muslims,¹⁷¹ showing the long anti-colonialist tradition in the Hawza Sadr would continue that in the late 1990s. In this context, the new Ba'athist Regime perceived the marja'iyya as a fifth column of the Iranian Shi'a, interceding for the Shah in the negotiation, and thus started a campaign of repression against the marja'iyya, beginning to spread his control over the religious field in Iraq.¹⁷² In this first wave of repression, the Regime started to close many institutions connected with the marja'iyya, including the University of Kufa, reforming the status of the *awqaf* and confiscating some of them, an essential tool of subsistence for the marja'iyya, closing private schools with a religious curriculum and closing the doors of the Sanctuary of Imam Ali at the end of March 1969 at the beginning of that year's Ashura's celebrations.¹⁷³ At the same time, a massive wave of arrests hit the Iranians living in Iraq, as well as those studying in the hawza, many accused of being US agents. A large number of Muhsin al-Hakim's collaborators were arrested, and arrest warrants were published for Mahdi al-Hakim, son of Muhsin, and the Ayatollah's house was searched.¹⁷⁴ Faced with this intense repression, neither Muhsin al-Hakim, who retired to his house and limited himself to teaching and studying, nor the Da'wa party reacted to the Regime's attack, fearing its strength, the worsening of the repression and the loss of the careful work for stages that had been preparing. Sayyid al-Hakim would then die in June 1970, ending his marja'iyya, continued by Abū al-Qāsim al-Khu'i, who continued a mostly quietist policy.¹⁷⁵

The Regime's repression nevertheless did not stop at the death of al-Hakim but focused on the Da'wa, bringing to the campaign against it during the years 1970-1974. In this sense, the Regime started infiltrating the Party and arresting the first cadres in 1970, arriving in September 1971 to arrest a Party's general Direction members. By torturing the members of the Party arrested, the Secret Services got to know and arrest many cells of the Party in different cities of central and southern Iraq. These arrests caused great chaos and almost stopped the party activities in 1973.¹⁷⁶

In the following year, in the spring of 1974, thanks to a new wave of repression and some confessions, the Secret services of the Ba'ath could identify the General Direction and

¹⁷¹ Laval (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*, p. 313.

¹⁷² Ibid., pp. 311-312.

¹⁷³ Wiley (1992). *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as*, p. 46.

¹⁷⁴ Abdul Jabbar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, pp. 202 – 206. Laval (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*, p. 317.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 319-321.

¹⁷⁶ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 77. Laval (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*, p. 330.

the Committee of Supervision of Party's Activities in Iraq. They arrest all members of the second but one and a few members of the General Direction. After months in prison, the Party cadres were executed in November 1974.¹⁷⁷ The remaining living members of the direction fled to Lebanon, leaving the Party without cadres in Iraq.

Other committees of exiled members were formed in Kuwait. These geographical divisions within the Party and internal rivalries start to sow disruption in the movement. Even though the Party could partly rebuild its structure between 1975 and 1979, the members within Iraq began to push for a more direct engagement with the Regime, hastening the carefully laid plan to act in stages, while the aforementioned geographical and political divisions weakened the Party.¹⁷⁸

At the same time, the signing of the 1975 Algiers Accord with Iran put an end to the disputes on the Southern border between the two countries and also put a stop to Iran's support for the Kurdish insurgency in the north of Iraq. Free of these preoccupations, the Ba'ath Regime had a free hand to deal with the Islamists.¹⁷⁹

Hence, the Regime moved to ban the religious pilgrimages for *Arba'in* in 1977; this caused a popular and spontaneous widespread uprising in central and southern Iraq without any intervention from the Da'wa.¹⁸⁰ The popular and spontaneous uprising was fueled by anger at the Arba'in Pilgrimage ban and several other factors that created widespread dissatisfaction among the mostly Shi'a population of Southern and Central Iraq. These factors included a drought that hit the Euphrates Valley and its farmers in the mid-1970s. The drought was caused by a dam built on the river by Syria and brought significant discontent among the peasants relying on the waters of the Euphrates, who were also the most numerous group of pilgrims to holy places during *Arba'in*. At the same time, heavy casualties struck the Shi'a community, demographically majoritarian in Iraq and thus bearing the most casualties for those fallen in the Army during the War in Kurdistan in 1974-1975.

Furthermore, a robust coercive campaign of Ba'athisation of Universities was carried out in 1976-1977. Finally, the strict control over the pilgrimages did economic damage to the traders and the Shrines, who benefitted from the flow of pilgrims to the holy cities, fueling more resentment toward the Regime.¹⁸¹ The rebellion and opposition to the Regime

¹⁷⁷ Abdul Jabar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, p. 207. Laval (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*, p. 332.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 310, 382. Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, pp. 74, 76.

¹⁷⁹ Hiro, Dilip (1989). *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict*. London: Grafton, pp. 17, 21, 22.

¹⁸⁰ Abdul Jabar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, p. 209.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

during the 1977 pilgrimage of *Arba'in* was, in the end, savagely crushed by the Regime, opening fire on the crowds and bringing to arrest and execution those considered responsible for the revolt.¹⁸²

After this popular uprising, the members of Da'wa in Iraq, even though the Party did not directly participate in the revolt, felt that the Iraqi population was ready for a rebellion against the Regime and that their work of sensibilization the Iraqi people to Islam brought fruits. They thus pushed for more direct action against the Regime. Furthermore, the Iranian Revolution broke out in neighboring Iran between 1978 and 1979. After a few months of confrontation with the Pahlavi Regime, the revolutionaries took power, overthrowing the last Pahlavi Shah of Iran. Soon after, a struggle for power within the revolutionary forces, which included a sizeable Islamic front guided by Khomeini, liberal and leftist forces, such as the National Front guided by Karim Sanjabi, or the Liberation Movement of Iran, the Tudeh Communist Party and the Mojahedin-e Khalq, and other leftist movement, ended with the victory of the Khomeinist front and the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Between 1981 and 1983, all opponents were purged from the revolutionaries' camp, leaving Khomeini and his followers firmly at the helm of the new Islamic Republic of Iran.¹⁸³

Following the victory of the Revolution in Iran, the Da'wa was forced to take a more direct political stance in front of these events, also due to the spontaneous demonstrations by the Iraqi people following the Iranian Revolution.¹⁸⁴ Being cut from the leadership abroad and looking for a solid figure to guide them, the members of Da'wa in Iraq turn to the ex-member of the Party, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, a well-known marja', famous for his writings and his standing as an intellectual among Muslim thinkers. Both parties take advantage of their collaboration; the Da'wa used Sadr's reputation, and Sadr relied on the Party's organizational structure. They decided to come out and confront the Regime more forcefully, following the Iranian example and hoping to raise the Iraqi Shi'a community in the wave of enthusiasm for the victory of the Revolution in Iran.

Nevertheless, this decision is criticized by the cadres of the Party abroad, conscious of the lack of necessary strength in the Party to overthrow the Regime.¹⁸⁵ Such open

¹⁸² Wiley (1992). *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as*, p. 52. Abdul Jabar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, p. 213.

¹⁸³ Abrahamian, Ervand (2008). *A History of Modern Iran*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 163, 167, 168, 181. Arjomand, Said Amir (1981). "Shi'ite Islam and the Revolution in Iran." In *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 293 – 316, p. 310.

¹⁸⁴ Wiley (1992). *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as*, pp. 89, 90.

¹⁸⁵ Laval (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*, pp. 384 – 393.

confrontation between the Ba'ath Regime and the Da'wa and Sayyid al-Sadr became more and more evident and open in the first half of 1979, leading to the first arrest of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in June 1979.¹⁸⁶ The arrest of Sadr triggered demonstrations in many Iraqi cities, mobilizing hundreds of supporters and pushing the Regime to immediate repression. Along with brute repression, the Regime arrested the Sadr's representatives (*wukala'*) and many people who were identified at the demonstration in his support. Many were sentenced to death.¹⁸⁷ With the seizure of power by Saddam Hussein in July 1979, the repression became even more brutal.

On July 22, 1979, Saddam Hussein finally took power over the Ba'ath Party, which had been governing Iraq since 1968 and, up to that moment, had been led by Hassan al-Bakr. In a swift coup, Hussein called for a special convention of the Party in Baghdad after the alleged security forces discovered a plot by the Syrian Regime to topple the Iraqi Regime with the help of some of its cadres.¹⁸⁸ At the convention, a Regional Command Council (RCC) party member, Muḥyī ' Abd al-Ḥussayn al-Mašhadī (1935 – 1979), confessed to being part of the plot and denounced his conspirators. At the same convention, many of the accomplices of Mashhadi were directly arrested, and many others were seized shortly after, leading to a staged trial on July 28 and the execution of almost all of the accused.¹⁸⁹ An even larger purge occurred within the Army, the unions, and the administration. At the higher level of the Ba'ath Party, the conspirators were substituted by Saddam's closest and most trusted aides, most of them belonging to his extended family or tribe.¹⁹⁰ Hassan al-Bakr also announced his resignation a few days before the convention on July 16, 1979, and announced his intention to transfer his role as President to Hussein, who was elected on the same day.¹⁹¹ Bakr was then placed under house arrest, where he died shortly after in 1982.¹⁹² This coup led to a shift in power with the Ba'ath Party and to a more and more personalized rule of

¹⁸⁶ Abdul Jabbar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, pp. 227, 231, 232.

¹⁸⁷ Wiley (1992). *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as*, p. 53. Abdul Jabbar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, p. 232.

¹⁸⁸ Tripp (2007). *A History of Iraq*, p. 214.

¹⁸⁹ Farouk-Sluglett, Marion and Sluglett, Peter (2001). *Iraq Since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*. London: IB Tauris, p. 209. Dawisha (2009). *Iraq. A Political History from Independence to Occupation*, pp. 213 214.

¹⁹⁰ The kinship connection was one of the main pillars of the power system built by Saddam Hussein during his 24-year-long rule of Iraq. *This paradigm involves developing a sense of "‘asabiyyah," or "solidarity," "group feeling," or "group consciousness," which forms a core of political power. This type of ‘asabiyyah was evident in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, mainly within the security and intelligence apparatuses.* Jebnoun and Kia and Kirk (2014). *Modern Middle East Authoritarianism. Roots, Ramifications, and Crisis*.

¹⁹¹ Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett (2001). *Iraq Since 1958*, p. 209.

¹⁹² Hiro (1989). *The Longest War*, p. 30.

Saddam Hussein, leading to the beginning of even more brutal repression against the Islamists.

In November, the director of the local committee of the Da'wa in Iraq was arrested, breaking the contacts between the cadres outside Iraq and the organization in the country.¹⁹³

Finally, after an attempt on the life of Vice Prime Minister Ṭāriq 'Azīz (1936 – 2015) was made on March 31, 1980, the Da'wa was hit by a last offensive by the Regime. The Party was considered responsible for Tariq's assassination attempt, even though, apparently, the Da'wa did not organize the attack and the Organization of Islamic Action would be responsible; a law against the Da'wa was promulgated, declaring it a subversive organization with connections with foreign powers and making it possible to execute all its members.¹⁹⁴ Following this law, the Party was effectively destroyed within Iraq, losing almost all its militants, while the survivors mainly fled to Iran.¹⁹⁵ Finally, also Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr was arrested on April 5, 1980, along with his sister, Amīnah al-Ṣadr or Bint al-Hudā (1937 – 1980), detained for a few days, and executed on April 8, 1980, closing thus the attempt to overthrow the Ba'ath in Iraq and killing the symbolic leader of this uprising.¹⁹⁶ This crackdown on the Da'wa was also motivated by the Regime's fear of what had just happened in Iran, stimulated by many who started calling Baqir al-Sadr the Iraqi Khomeini and who hoped for an Islamic revolution in Iraq as well.

Nevertheless, even considering this fatal blow to the Da'wa, the Iraqi authorities did not stop looking for its militants in Iraqi society, continuing to arrest, torture, and persecute whoever showed any possible, actual, or only suspected connection with the Da'wa party or any form of Islamism.¹⁹⁷ These campaigns brought a near-annihilation of opposition in Iraq and still kept pressure on these groups, blocking any effort to reorganize and build new cells and groups within Iraq.¹⁹⁸ The combined efforts of the infiltration and repression brought almost the neutralization of *independent religious discourse in the country* by 1990.¹⁹⁹ This

¹⁹³ Laval (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*, pp. 394 – 406.

¹⁹⁴ Wiley (1992). *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as*, p. 55. *Six members of the Hakim family were executed, and 100 were detained in 1983. Ten more were killed in 1985; and later in the decade, the regime assassinated Mahdi al-Hakim (a grandson of Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim, d. 1970) while he was on a trip to Sudan. Hundreds of lesser known Da'wa Party members were also executed in a mass campaign; and thousands of Shi'is, whom the Ba'athists claimed were Iranian nationals, were deported.* Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 76.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 79. Laval, (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*, p. 414.

¹⁹⁶ Abdul Jabar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, p. 234. Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 76. Laval (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*, pp. 408 – 409.

¹⁹⁷ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, pp. 77, 79, 89.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 80, 81.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 107.

also led to the creation of animosity against the Regime, especially among the Shi'a, who were the main targets of this repression as it was focused on the Shi'a Islamists. So, any Shi'a was a possible suspect of involvement with the Da'wa or similar movements.²⁰⁰ This repression also focused on the hawza itself, as we have seen, and the number of students in the hawza diminished; many of the international students coming to study in Iraq were expelled or denied entry, and schools in the hawza were closed or shut down.²⁰¹

1.1.4 The 1980s Iran – Iraq War.

Just a few months after the execution of Muhammad Baqir and Amina al-Sadr, in September 1980, Iraq decided to attack Iran, starting thus the eight-year war between the two countries that would have dire and profound consequences for both Iraq and Iraq. The events of the previous year played a central role in pushing Saddam Hussein to decide to invade Iran. The victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and their declared aim of exporting their Revolution outside the country, along with the widespread revolts in Iraq led by the Da'wa and Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, pushed the idea that the newly established Islamic Republic was a danger that had to be checked. At the same time, the Revolution in Iran led to the belief that the country's state apparatus and military were in disarray and chaos, with the military spread thin all over the country to put down rebellions and not-too-efficient aviation. Hussein's advisors spread these beliefs, and the exiled generals of the Shah, who hoped to push Iraq to invade Iran and re-establish the monarchy, were downsizing the risks of such a campaign to influence Iraq's decision. At the same time, these generals were given a free hand to fuel rebellion in Iran against the newly formed Islamic Republic.²⁰² Finally, Saddam wanted to settle the dispute on the Šaṭṭ al-ʿArab (Shatt al-Arab) border, regulated with dissatisfaction by both parties with the Algiers Treaty of 1975, and conquer the Arab majority and oil-rich region of Khuzestan, giving Iraq more comprehensive access to the Gulf, facilitating and increasing its oil exports.²⁰³

After the first victories, also thanks to the surprise effect, the Iraqi Army fell short of its objectives. They could not capture all the territory they wanted or the cities they had set as their objectives. The Iranian Army quickly set up a more vigorous resistance than the

²⁰⁰ Wiley (1992). *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as*, p. 51. Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 83.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 83. Wiley (1992). *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as*, p. 48.

²⁰² Hiro (1989). *The Longest War*, pp. 35 – 37.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 38.

Iraqis had expected, and soon, the war became a war of attrition, but still inside Iranian territories. The second phase of the war, which lasted six years, saw a shift in this equilibrium, with the Iranian counter-offensive of May 1982 and the Iraqi Army changing into a defensive position. This situation lasted until the end of the war in 1988, with the opening of new fronts, such as the War of the Cities, with bombardments of the country's major cities, and the Tanker War that contributed to the internationalization of the war with general support to Iraq from the US, the USSR, the Gulf countries and Europe.²⁰⁴ The War, in all its duration, was characterized by the Iranian human waves attacks and the Iraqi use of chemical weapons, marking it as a ferocious and unrelenting war.

The war had, of course, dire consequences on Iraq in general, as we shall see more in-depth, but it also had a robust and heavy impact on the Iraqi Shi'a community. As a matter of fact, the Shi'a of southern Iraq were not just the group making up the more significant part of the Iraqi troops; they were also, quite obviously, the group that bore most of the price in human lives for the war.²⁰⁵ This heavy price did not go unnoticed by the Regime initially, and the Ba'ath launched a series of programs to help maintain high morale and loyalty among those families who had lost their members during the war with Iran. Among these programs was the award of medals to the families of the fallen, visits by the President were also discussed, or giving out presents, such as TVs or cars. With the advancement of the war, the economic conditions of Iraq worsened, and such programs could not be continued.²⁰⁶ The worsening economic conditions also hit Iraqi households, which could not survive anymore on the war pension of a fallen family member or live on the salaries of those who worked and resorted to selling furniture or personal belongings to support their families.²⁰⁷ This situation led to a growing detachment from the Regime's effort to maintain support for the war. Blaydes argues that even though the Regime spent considerable capital, both economic and symbolical, on maintaining the morale high, the differential cost of the war on the Iraqi

²⁰⁴ Abdul Jabbar, Faleh. *The War Generation in Iraq: A Case of Failed Etatist Nationalism*. In Potter, G. Lawrence and Sick, G. Gary (2004). *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 121 – 140, p. 127.

²⁰⁵ *Iraqi Shi'a were believed to make up 80–85 per cent of the military rank and file in the early 1980s*. Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 122. Abdul Jabbar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, pp. 254, 255.

²⁰⁶ *The Iran-Iraq War triggered what has been called an "economic free-fall" for Iraq, which went from \$35 billion in foreign currency reserves prior to the start of the war to a debt of at least \$80 billion by the end of the conflict. [...] Iraq came under increasing financial strain as a result of the costs of war as well as the drop in world oil prices in 1986*. Ibid., pp. 127, 145.

²⁰⁷ *At its highest, Iran spent no more than 12 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product on the war - against Iraq's 57 per cent*. Hiro (1989). *The Longest War*, pp. 4, 58. Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, pp. 144, 145. Abdul Jabbar, (2004). *The War Generation in Iraq*, p. 130.

communities *significantly undermined investment in the regime, setting the conditions for the 1991 Uprisings, which represented a critical political rupture.*²⁰⁸ Abdul Jabar also shares Blaydes's conclusions that the war led to a significant detachment between the Iraqi population and the Regime, which lost the allegiance of a generation brought up with nationalist socialism ideals and imbued with the prospect of quick economic growth and development.²⁰⁹ The shift in the war also weighed on the Iraqi population. From a war of expansion in 1980, it became a war for Iraq's own territory in 1982, making the Iraqi soldiers fight to defend their country. However, the bad fortunes of Iraq in the War, its length, and its difficulties led to a decrease in popular support for the War. The rise in nationalism due to the necessity of defending Iraqi soil meant that Iraq could fight such a long war with Iran. The fight to defend Iraq after the mid-1982 offensive led to such a rise, just like the fight to push back Iraqis in 1980 from Iranian land had given a unifying factor to the new Iranian Republic.²¹⁰ At the same time, the change of the war from a quick, glorious campaign into an eight-year-long strenuous war of defense led to a loss of faith in the Regime and events such as revolts in the southern and central cities of Karbala, Nasiriyah, Hillah, and Basra in May 1982 when Iranian troops entered in Iraqi territory.²¹¹ From that moment on, the residents of Southern Iraq lived in a war zone.²¹² In his exploration of the Iraqi war generation, Abdul Jabar states that it would be simplistic to describe the Iraqi sentiment toward the War as going from enthusiasm to frustration and back to patriotism. He declares: *In all phases, there was a constant flow of the antithesis. The trickle of desertion, for example, never stopped in all phases, nor did active or passive opposition to the war effort. Mixed feelings, even among some staunch enthusiasts, never failed to bewilder the mind and soul.*²¹³ Thus, even though we find evidence of initial enthusiasm for the war, later frustration by the retreat of Iraqi troops and the length of the war, and finally, a rise in patriotism to defend Iraqi land, in general, the war proved to be very heavy on Iraqis and especially on the central and southern communities, mostly made up of Shi'as.

²⁰⁸ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 122. Abdul Jabar, (2004). *The War Generation in Iraq*, pp. 129, 130, 131.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 129.

²¹⁰ Hiro (1989). *The Longest War*, pp. 3, 4, 43.

²¹¹ *Iran's Islamic leaders did not want the war. But once it was thrust on them they saw its potential for welding the nation together under the revolutionary Islamic banner: warfare was to be a means of consolidating the revolution.* Ibid., pp. 4, 61.

²¹² Faust (2015). *The Ba'athification of Iraq*, p. 59.

²¹³ Abdul Jabar, (2004). *The War Generation in Iraq*, p. 127.

The fact that the war in Iraq mainly weighted up on Shi'a did not go unnoticed by the Iraqi Regime, as we have highlighted, nor by the Iranian one. Both tried to use this fact to their advantage or at least contain the damages. On the one hand, the Iraqi Regime tried to create loyalty among the Shi'a troops in the Iraqi Army, who were the majority of the troops during the Iran-Iraq War. The Regime feared that the Iraqi Shi'a could fall for the propaganda of the Iranian Regime and turn against the Ba'ath, preferring not to fight with Iranians with whom they shared Shi'ism.²¹⁴ Furthermore, during the 1980s, Iranian propaganda started depicting Saddam as anti-Islamic, hoping to draw the Iraqi Shi'a closer to the Iranians for religious reasons. This attempt made the control over the Iraqi Shi'a even more of a priority for the Ba'ath Regime, and the creation of an institutionalized body of Regime-loyal religious men, an attempt we have analyzed in the previous section, was facilitated by the war mobilization and emergency measures linked to it.²¹⁵ Saddam Hussein tried to portray himself as a pious Muslim, visiting holy shrines, both Sunni and Shia. Hussein declared Imam Ali's birthday a national holiday, referencing Shi'a images and themes.²¹⁶ As we have seen, the Ba'ath policy toward religion tried to emphasize unity and downplay sectarian differences.

Nevertheless, soon, the Regime realized that Iraqi Shi'a had their rites, history, and beliefs and could not be treated the same as Sunnis, and thus, another strategy had to be found.²¹⁷ In this sense, the Iraqi Regime tried to frame the War as a war between Persians and Arabs, leaving aside the similarities of religion between the Iranians and the Iraqi Shi'a. The Regime tried to frame Iranian Shi'ism as a Persian corruption of real Islam. It started using names and events connected to Shi'a history to describe weapons of the Iraqi arsenal or events of the War.²¹⁸ Thus, creating an Arabized and Iraqi version of Shi'ism was of the utmost importance for the Regime. The Ba'ath started doing so by proclaiming that the hawza, if guided by Iraqis, would be strengthened and also by declaring that Iranians had a centuries-long hate for Islam.²¹⁹ These ideas were propagated through a Ministry of

²¹⁴ Even though Iraqi Shi'as shared Shi'i beliefs with Iranians, it is interesting to notice that: *Many Iraqi Shi'a—co-religionists with Iranian Shi'a—feared cultural and political subjugation at the hand of Iran. 26 When the conflict was initiated, Iraqi Shi'a occupied both high and low positions within the Iraqi regime and, in general, were themselves worried about the rise of Khomeini.* Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, pp. 126-127. Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p.36.

²¹⁵ Ibid. pp. 36, 37. Hiro, (1989). *The Longest War*, pp. 257, 258.

²¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 34, 35.

²¹⁷ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 35.

²¹⁸ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 126.

²¹⁹ *The regime hoped "the final outcome of applying the above [the program of Arabization of Shi'ism]" would be "the strengthening of the hawza in Iraq and its future management." Importantly, this would be "carried*

Endowments and Religious Affairs campaign in coordination with the Ministry of Information.²²⁰ Through this campaign, the idea of Islam as an Arab religion was propagated, trying to depict how Persians tried throughout history to manipulate Islam, to fight against the Prophets' family and his companions, and to equate them with Zionists and evil.²²¹ Similar accusations, especially racism against Arabs and hate of Islam, were also attributed to the *Šu'ūbiyyah*, a term also used to describe the Shi'a and the Iranians, especially after the beginning of the war with Iran.²²² In particular, the Regime wanted to demonstrate Shi'ism's Arabic nature and the compatibility of its values with Arab nationalism. The Ba'ath also supported Regime-sponsored *Ashura* ceremonies, which were widely shown on television and had massive press coverage, while repressing all independent ceremonies.²²³ Through these policies, the Regime was trying to win over the Shi'a and take control of the Shi'a milieu.²²⁴ For the Regime, the Islamists that put their religious identity before their Arab identity were distorting Islam, as they saw Islam as the true Arab religion and thus inseparable from Arab Nationalism, as theorized by Michel Aflaq. Thus, the Islamists were persecuted, and the transnational aspect of Shi'ism was attacked.²²⁵ This ideology presented a mix of Arab and Iraqi patriotism with religious thought, uniting them and using them altogether. It used figures from Iraq's ancient history and Islamic history.²²⁶

To spread these ideas about Arab-Iraqi Shi'ism, the Regime, as we have seen, needed clerics loyal to its ideas and goals, and thus, it moved towards an attempt to control the religious environment in Iraq.²²⁷ The necessities of war, therefore, fit in perfectly with the previous plans to infiltrate and control the Shi'a religious environment that we examined in the previous section. However, as we have seen, the Shi'a clerics were difficult to control as they were more independent, in general, and economically as well, and thus less susceptible to pressure from the government. Also, they were connected to Iran through a shared sect,

out by Iraqi men of religion themselves and by not giving other nationalities (*jinsiyyat*) the opportunity to change them." Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 65.

²²⁰ Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza Under Siege*, p. 32. This decision was also implemented with the broadcasting of drama series showing the Persian hostility to Arabs and Islam.

²²¹ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 66.

²²² Bengio, Ofra (1998). *Saddam's Word. Political Discourse in Iraq*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 103-104.

²²³ *Instead, their policy was to eliminate all manifestations of Shi'ism that lay outside of their control while at the same time promoting a regime-sponsored, pro-Ba'athist Shi'ism*. Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, pp. 66, 67.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

²²⁶ Abdul Jabbar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, p. 266. Abdul Jabbar, (2004). *The War Generation in Iraq*, p. 128.

²²⁷ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, pp. 31, 32.

the transnational vocation of Shi'ism, and thanks to the continuous exchanges between Iraq and Iran due to the presence of Shi'a Sanctuaries in both countries.²²⁸ Nevertheless, as the Iraqi military was greatly enlarged after the beginning of the War and most of the drafted soldiers were Shi'a, the need for military chaplains also grew, and, statistically, it grew more for the Shi'a who represented most of the troops, as we already examined. Being in the Army, the religious chaplain had to undergo a screening process, which meant that the Army would collect information on them, all helpful information to map the religious environment.²²⁹

While these efforts helped the Regime to map and further infiltrate the religious environment, they were not central in keeping the Shi'a on the Regime's side. The Regime's officials who tried to propagate these ideas on an Arab version of Shi'ism and Islam could not hide very well their anti-Shi'a bias, which resulted in the community feeling discriminated against, even though the Regime did not openly use any sectarian language and was, on the contrary, accusing its adversaries of fueling sectarianism.²³⁰ Along with the attempts to win over the Iraqi Shi'a community with such rhetoric, the Regime kept up the repression campaign that had been going on since its seizure of power in 1968.²³¹ All clerics who did not collaborate with the Regime by condemning Iran and Khomeini as heretics were to be punished.²³² Bengio thus argues that the Ba'ath Regime in Iraq was sectarian even though it proclaimed the opposite.²³³ What kept the Shi'i soldiers from revolting against the Ba'ath was more their patriotism, as we have seen that when Iranians entered Iraqi territory,

²²⁸ Ibid. pp. 52, 53.

²²⁹ *An applicant wishing to become an army chaplain was required to provide extensive information to the regime. This included which schools he had attended and his employment history. The regime investigated his father, brothers, and uncles, whether he had ever been convicted of a crime, and if he had belonged to any political parties or organisations. Following the investigation, regime officials then completed a form on each applicant outlining, among other things, his "political orientation", "personal characteristics", "the reputation of his family"; his "integrity"; and whether he had "any relatives, to the third degree, who had committed crimes." This was invaluable information for a regime attempting to understand and control the religious landscape. [...] By the final years of the war, the Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, Abdullah Fadil, claimed that there were 4,250 men of religion in the Army. For the regime, this meant that it now had thousands of religious leaders who had been through extensive background checks and could be trusted. Some of these chaplains came from families with a tradition of religious scholarship. Therefore, the investigations unearthed important information about larger networks of scholars and helped the regime to map Iraq's religious landscape. Ibid., pp. 40, 41.*

²³⁰ Bengio (1998). *Saddam's Word*, p. 101.

²³¹ A student who refused to join the Ba'ath Party was accused of being a member of the Da'wa and sentenced to life imprisonment. Another one wore the veil while at university and refused to join the Party. She was also sentenced to life imprisonment but was pardoned in 1991. Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 151.

²³² Laval (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*, p. 322. Clerics did not need to oppose the Regime to raise its suspicion openly; it was enough not to take part in the Regime's sponsored religious activities or join its calls to condemn Iran. Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 63. Muhammad al-Sadr, the future founder and leader of the Sadrist movement, was under house arrest for most of the 1980s, showing the extent of the Regime's repression. Interview with Sheikh R. M., Najaf (12/06/2024).

²³³ Bengio (1998). *Saddam's Word*, p. 102.

they prevailed over sectarian differences.²³⁴ At the same time, many Iraqi Shi'a did not see the model of the Islamic Republic as a model to imitate, even if they were against the Ba'ath Regime, seeing in the Iranian counter-offensive an attempt to export their version of Islam and impose it on Iraq.²³⁵

1.1.5 The Exiled Iraqi Islamist Opposition and the Iran – Iraq War.

The Iranian Regime, on the other hand, tried to exploit the fact that most Iraqi soldiers were Shi'a by working on their shared sect belongings and by accusing Saddam Hussein of being a heretic.

At the same time, the Iranian Regime harbored Iraqi Islamist groups that had escaped Iraq after the devastating decade of campaigns of repression and the 1979-1980 events; many of these opposition groups moved out of Iraq, taking refuge in the newly formed Islamic Republic of Iran or Syria.²³⁶ From there, the Da'wa Party and the other Islamist opposition groups, in particular the MAI and, from 1982, the SCIRI, continued their opposition from outside Iraq and inside Iraq, mainly from the mountainous area of Kurdistan, launching attacks on the Ba'athists all along the 1980s. These groups, having lost most of their members and organizational capacities inside Iraq during the 1979-1980 repression campaign, focused on single attacks and guerrilla operations inside Iraq against Ba'athist officials, or even on Saddam Hussein himself,²³⁷ and in general in supporting and siding with Iranians in their war effort against Iraq, making them lose their more strictly party-like or movement-like nature, at least concerning their operation inside Iraq.²³⁸ These groups' hopes lay in the idea that if Iran had won the war, the Ba'ath would be overthrown. Thus, an Islamic regime would be created in Iraq, bringing to the realization of the goals of the Iraqi Islamist movements. Of course, these fronts were different and varied, and all movements had different strategies to bring forth the downfall of the Iraqi Regime. However, a strong focus on the war effort grew and became increasingly important among the various groups as the war continued.²³⁹ The Badr Brigade, the militia of the SCIRI, was effectively a unit in the

²³⁴ Hiro (1989). *The Longest War*, p. 257.

²³⁵ Abdul Jabar, (2004). *The War Generation in Iraq*, p. 127.

²³⁶ Abdul Jabar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, pp. 235, 265.

²³⁷ Wiley (1992). *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as*, pp. 59, 60.

²³⁸ Ibid., pp. 62, 63. Abdul Jabar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, p. 254.

²³⁹ Ibid., pp. 250 – 252.

Iranian Army fighting alongside the rest of the troops. Furthermore, parts of these groups underwent an “Iranization” in their ideology during their stay in Iran, accepting almost fully the concept of *wilayat al-faqih* and, thus, the idea that clerics should govern the Islamic State.²⁴⁰

While the base of operation in Iran permitted these movements to continue their campaign against the Ba’ath, their acceptance of the Khomeinist doctrine was probably necessary to receive Iranian support and shelter. Participating in such a direct way in the Iranian war effort also had other consequences for these organizations. The Iran-Iraq War, after the initial Iraqi penetration into Iranian territory, changed drastically with the Iranian counter-offensive of 1982, which saw Iranian troops pushing Iraqis back and entering Iraqi territory. This change led the War to be perceived not anymore only as a Ba’athist war but as a war of survival for the Iraqi state, in which many lay-Shi’as, even if against the Ba’ath, feared the imposition of an Islamic regime model like in Iran.²⁴¹ The “war of survival” feeling led to a surge in patriotism among Iraqis, which, according to some scholars, would also explain how Iraq was capable of withstanding eight years of war.²⁴² This patriotic feeling at the same time also led the Iraqis, even the Shi’as, to grow alienated from the Islamist groups in Iran, which they saw with increasing hostility as the war progressed, as groups fighting against Iraq and its citizens.²⁴³

Jabbar notes that these Islamist groups privileged Shi’ism transnationalism over their national nature, abandoning it almost totally when they were forced to move to Iran, and in doing so, they culturally and politically lost contact and touch with the reality inside Iraq.²⁴⁴

The end of the War in 1988 also brought to an end the possibility of the Iraqi Islamist groups using Iran as a base to launch their attacks, as Iran did not want to provoke Iraq into another conflict and moved quickly to ensure that the Iraqi Islamists in Iran did not continue their campaign against the Ba’ath.²⁴⁵

This situation finally led to an exodus of militants and refugees from Iran and Syria to Europe, where some of these organizations took new forms and pursued new ways of fighting the Ba’ath but almost lost their direct base of operation to launch assaults into Iraq (the Badr was still present in Iran as it was the SCIRI).

²⁴⁰ Laval (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*, p. 428. Abdul Jabar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, p. 249.

²⁴¹ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, pp. 126-127. Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 36.

²⁴² Abdul Jabar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, pp. 254, 255.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 255, 277.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 264, 265.

The participation of these groups in the Iranian war effort caused many Iraqis, even among the Shi'a, to grow a strong antipathy for these groups during and after the war, leading to a sort of rivalry between those rebels against the Ba'ath that had remained in Iraq during the 1980s and had fought against Iran and those who had escaped and had fought alongside Iran, causing a surge in nationalism among the formers, and leaving an open space for any form of opposition to the Ba'ath that would also have an "Iraqi" character and did not have Iranian ties.²⁴⁶ The sympathy toward a sort of "Iraqi/Arab/National" Islam was also fueled during the years of the war with Iran by the specific Regime politics we explored and not only by the antipathy to the Islamists in Iran.

1.1.6 The 1980s Islamist Generation.

The policies implemented by the Regime in the 1980s were the basis for the Ba'ath's development of its strategy in the 1990s.²⁴⁷ The repression of the 1970s left Iraq almost devoid of Islamist opposition and certainly without organized opposition within the country, making it very hard for Islamists to organize and carry out actions of political activism during the 1980s. This objective was reached thanks to a mix of repression and the implementation of measures to control the religious field in Iraq, as we have seen.

Raouf states that the first generation of Islamists in Iraq was one of the Islamist movements such as Da'wa, the MAI, and the SCIRI after 1982, and most of this generation was either killed or had to go into exile following the Regime's repression campaigns. The second generation was formed by those who remained in Iraq during the 1980s and focused on religion and studies, abandoning political activism. This group took part later on in the 1991 Intifada and then either fled Iraq afterward or returned to a dormant state.²⁴⁸ The Islamist generation of the 1980s was thus basically not active politically inside Iraq and left a void to be filled by a new generation in the 1990s.

Few groups, especially those supported by Iran that had their base of operation in Iran, could continue their political activism throughout the 1980s and organize attacks in Iraq, hitting specific objectives and attempting multiple times at the life of Saddam. These activities were carried out in the context of the Iran-Iraq War and with a base of operation

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 266.

²⁴⁷ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 37.

²⁴⁸ Ra'uf (1999). *Muhammad Muhammad Sādiq al-Ṣadr*, pp. 88-91 Wiley (1992). *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as*, p. 58.

either in Iran itself or in Iraqi Kurdistan. The support for this kind of operation by Iran drastically diminished with the end of the War in 1988, as Iran did not want to provoke any other outbreak with Iraq.²⁴⁹ Attacks continued but on a much smaller and rare scale.

The fact that most Islamists in Iraq had been exiled or killed left space for scholars close to the Regime or those formed by the Regime itself, reducing the competition in the religious field they faced. This situation opened up a new space for new emerging religious leaders, such as Muhammad al-Sadr, who was not a known scholar during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s but became a prominent leader of Islamism in Iraq in the 1990s. Nevertheless, traditional religious figures not affiliated with the Regime but not openly against it, following a more “quietist” approach, still commanded respect and many followers.

At the same time, as space was being opened for new religious activists and leaders during the decades between the 1980s and 1990s, the Iraqi Shi’a community was building up resentment toward the Regime. As we have seen, the War with Iran had a high cost on the Shi’a community in Iraq, and the 1990 Kuwait War and 1991 Intifada and its repression will build up on this resentment, as we shall see in the next section.²⁵⁰

At the end of the 1980s thus, Iraqi Shi’as harbored deep resentment toward the Iraqi Regime due to the long and challenging war period, during which their community had had the most losses among all Iraqi communities, bearing the weight of the war effort disproportionately compared to other groups and not receiving any compensation after the war for the deep crisis running through Iraqi economics.

At the same time, as we have seen, the war had caused a rise in Iraqi nationalism, which did not go forcefully in favor of the Ba’ath regime but did go certainly against Iran, and an antipathy for the Iraqi Islamists in Iran, creating a possible sympathy and predisposition for a more “national” Islamist movement.²⁵¹ The possibility and interest in a national Iraqi Islamism was not only spreading within the Iraqi Shi’a community but was

²⁴⁹ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 82.

²⁵⁰ *The seeds of this divorce were latent in the interval between the two wars, but they ripened in the runup to, and during, the 1991 Gulf War. It overwhelmed the bulk of the war generation and revealed various forms of apathy, abstention, or conformism. In the end, the majority of them took up arms against their own government in March 1991. Much of the story of the war generation, who lost their sense of identity and belonging, lies therein.* Abdul Jabar, (2004). *The War Generation in Iraq*, p. 122.

²⁵¹ Jabar points to a division between a “statist nationalism” in Iraq, supported by the Ba’ath Regime, and a “popular nationalism”, which supported the Iraqis’ patriotic spirit to fight for the long eight-year war with Iran. This kind of patriotism did not imply support for the Regime, and it might be the basis of the sympathy toward the idea of a “national” Islamist movement. Of course, also the long Regime’s campaign in support of an “Arab” and “Iraqi” Islam played a role in the building of support for this idea, maybe indirectly and unconsciously for many Iraqis; indeed, it played a role in the material support for the emergence of such a movement, as we shall see. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

also in the interest of the Regime, which had spent eight years of war with Iran, and even before that, in the attempt to create an Iraqi Islam and, in particular, an Iraqi Shi'ism, in order to prevent the Iraqi Shi'a to side with the Iranians or sympathize for them during the War. Years of propaganda in this sense did not get much support for the Regime-sponsored Islam but probably helped, along with the antipathy towards the Iraqi Islamists in Iran, to prepare the terrain and create a predisposition among the Iraqi Shi'a towards such a concept. Indeed, when Muhammad al-Sadr proposed such a concept during the 1990s, it found great resonance with the Iraqi Shi'a population.

Iraq entered a volatile moment after the ceasefire with Iran was declared on August 20, 1988. On the one hand, it had a massive military in terms of equipment and number of soldiers; on the other hand, it had no economic means to maintain it and was ridden by a deep economic and social crisis.²⁵² Thus, the Iraqi Regime had to decide how to deal with a demobilizing one-million-men army with no more war to fight in. Those who served, described for eight years as national heroes and now convinced by the Regime's propaganda that they had won the war, expected to be reintegrated into civilian life, get good jobs and social security, and share Iraq's wealth.²⁵³

However, there were no resources to meet such demands. Iraq had spent between 94 and 112 billion dollars to wage the war, plus 41 billion in weapons imports.²⁵⁴ At the same time, Iraq had to obtain enormous loans from neighbors in the Gulf to keep up with this level of spending.²⁵⁵ These massive debts also hindered reconstruction plans, which kept Iraq from rebuilding its economy and infrastructure. Iraq's OPEC quota also prevented the country from using its oil wealth to counter the economic crisis, and thus, the 1983 austerity program had to be continued.²⁵⁶ A crescent sense of tension was growing inside the Iraqi Regime on how to deal with this issue without getting the Army out of control.²⁵⁷

As a matter of fact, during the years of the War, the need for quick and numerous recruits led to a diminishing number of loyal Ba'athists in the Army and a rise of recruits that were not forcefully of proven loyalty to the Regime.²⁵⁸

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Hiro (1989). *The Longest War*, p. 5.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 4, 250.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 259.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 269.

²⁵⁷ Abdul Jabar, (2004). *The War Generation in Iraq*, p. 131.

²⁵⁸ Hiro (1989). *The Longest War*, pp. 257, 258.

Furthermore, the Army leaders were depicted as heroes for the war period, leading their popularity to soar, overtaking the popularity of Ba'athist leaders. These two factors worried the Iraqi Regime about the possible behavior of the Army. Thus, the Regime at the end of the 1980s faced two possibilities, according to Jabar's analysis: to either reform itself or enter a new military adventure.

The international situation also pushed the Regime to find a quick solution. With the beginning of the collapse of the USSR and the reforms of Eastern Europe's countries, the Ba'ath had to face a crisis in its political model; according to Abdul Jabbar, the crumbling of the socialist model marked the *right time to shift to an Islamist model* for the Regime. Iraq also faced a very practical problem: the Iraqi Army was mainly supplied with Soviet weapons, without which no spares could be obtained to maintain its arsenal. Furthermore, in 1989, uprisings erupted in Jordan and Algeria, and rulers of both countries conceded reforms such as economic liberalization, a new constitution, a free press, and similar reforms. Saddam Hussein promised similar changes, but they were never delivered.²⁵⁹ However, the prospect of a new war was burdensome on Iraq, which was short on funds and faced a possible war with the US or its allies, a different kind of adversary than Iran. The end of the 1980s was thus a perilous and unstable moment for Iraq, leaving many unresolved issues and calling for a quick solution. Saddam Hussein found one in a new military adventure.

²⁵⁹ Abdul Jabar, (2004). *The War Generation in Iraq*, pp. 132, 133.

1.2 Second Chapter: Iraq's Terrible Decade: the 1990s.

1.2.1 The Second Gulf War (1990-1991).

Exiting from the war with Iran, burdened with debts and hoping to re-establish the country to its former economic prosperity with its oil production, Iraq was stopped on this path by its massive war debts,²⁶⁰ the limits imposed by its OPEC quota, and the lack of collaboration by its Gulf neighbors.²⁶¹ Both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait refused to transform the war loans into grants, but, in particular, Kuwait strongly resisted the requests from Iraq to let it raise its oil production quota of OPEC to increase its oil revenues and help the Iraqi economy. Even more, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates raised their own oil production, not complying with their OPEC quotas, damaging Iraqi attempts to scale up its revenues from oil. Iraqi demands to change this situation became increasingly menacing, but Kuwait did not give up, finally leading to the beginning of the hostilities.²⁶² Saddam also held the belief that the US would not attack Iraq, a thought he had formed by misreading signals from the US diplomats and the international context. Similar misreadings about Saddam's intentions also concerned most Western diplomats, first and foremost the US ambassador in Iraq at the time, April Glaspie, were convinced Iraq would not invade Kuwait.²⁶³ Fred Halliday states that the invasion *was not the doing of a madman*; it was a miscalculated gamble, like the war with Iran.²⁶⁴

Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, claiming it had been divided from Iraq by colonialists' designs and that it was within the mission of defending the Arab nation and Arabism that Iraq was reclaiming Kuwait as part of its state. In the run-up to the invasion, Hussein deployed a rhetoric meant to justify the attack; he accused Gulf countries of being tools of the Zionists and the imperialists, and in particular, he accused Kuwait of stealing oil

²⁶⁰ Iraq passed from a 30\$ billion foreign exchange reserve in 1980 to a 100\$ billion debt to overseas creditors in 1988, plus double the amount for repairing war damage. Finlan, Alistair (2003). *The Gulf War 1991*. Routledge, p. 11.

²⁶¹ Alnasrawi, Abbas (2001). "Iraq: economic sanctions and consequences, 1990–2000." *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 205-218, p. 207.

²⁶² Ibid., pp. 207, 208. Finlan (2003). *The Gulf War 1991*, p. 25.

²⁶³ Halliday, Fred (1994). "The Gulf War 1990-1991 and the study of international relations." *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 109 – 130, pp. 114 115.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 155.

from the Iraqi Rumaith oil field next to the border of the two countries, or of trying to occupy secretly Iraqi territory while Iraq was busy fighting Iran.²⁶⁵ Messages claiming that by invading Kuwait, Iraqi oil wealth would increase by 40\$ billion were aired on Iraqi television to win the support of Iraqis; these were met with skepticism and mixed feelings, failing to win Iraqis' support for this new invasion. At the same time, the Iraqi government apologized to Iran for the long War and pointed at US machinations as the cause of the long conflict between the two countries. Such a position infuriated many of the Iraqi war veterans, who felt that all their sacrifices had been for nothing and that they did not want to enter yet a new war while still recovering from the last one.²⁶⁶ Jabbar states that when the War broke out, the widespread feeling among the war generation was anxiety, leading to low morale in the Army ranks.²⁶⁷ Using the control it had developed over the Iraqi religious environment, the Regime also forced some prominent Shi'a clerics in Najaf to issue a *pro-Ba'athist fatwa* in August 1990; in the document, al-Khu'i stated that *it was not permissible to "seek support from heretics against Muslims,"* implying that the Kuwaitis and the Saudis should not look for help in the US.²⁶⁸ This level of instrumentalization and control of the religious environment was possible only thanks to the Regime's efforts in the previous two decades to control this environment; we see thus the high level of control and capacity to manipulate that the Regime had managed to put in place.²⁶⁹

The invasion immediately triggered an international response. The UN Security Council, following the US lead, imposed sanctions on Iraq with resolution 661 on August 6, 1990. The sanctions were some of the most comprehensive and effective sanction regimes ever imposed, and many attempts to alleviate them were blocked either by the US and the UK or by the Iraqi Regime itself, probably in an effort to refuse what they saw as concessions to illegitimate demands by the UN.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Abdul Jabar, (2004). *The War Generation in Iraq*, pp. 133 134.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 133.

²⁶⁸ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 111.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 110.

²⁷⁰ Halliday, Denis J. (1999). "The Impact of the UN Sanctions on the People of Iraq." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 28, N. 2, pp. 29-37.

1.2.2 The Coalition Response.

The response to the Kuwait invasion by Iraqi forces did not limit itself to economic sanctions. One day after the vote on the imposition of Sanctions by the UN Security Council, on August 7, 1990, US troops started deploying in Saudi Arabia with Operation Desert Shield. The invasion of Kuwait quickly turned Saddam and Iraq from an ally against the spread of the Iranian Islamic Revolution and the protector of the Gulf countries against the Iranian threat into an international enemy.²⁷¹ A few months after the first deployment of US troops in the Gulf, on January 16, 1991, the forces of a US-led coalition primarily formed by the UK, France, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt and supported by a long list of other countries, started a bombardment campaign against Iraq. The air campaign targeted not only Iraq's military facilities but also civilian infrastructures, such as power plants, factories, telecommunications networks, schools, hospitals, civilian buildings, roads, and bridges.²⁷²

Iraq, on paper, had an impressive military force, considered the fourth largest Army in the world and the sixth largest aviation.²⁷³ Furthermore, Iraqi troops were hardened by eight years of conflict with Iran. Of course, on the ground, the situation was quite different, and the lack of spare pieces for many vehicles, airplanes, and weapons, in general, gravely diminished the effectiveness of the Iraqi military. More than anything else, it still was the extremely low morale of the Iraqi troops that decided the direction of the war.²⁷⁴ As we previously noted, Jabbar remarked on the low morale among Iraqi soldiers at the beginning of the war. The soldiers' lack of trust in their government and their deep dissatisfaction with its decisions will be clearly demonstrated by the Intifada of March 1991, which we will analyze in the following section.

The campaign of the coalition forces against the Iraqi Army in Kuwait and Iraq, in general, was very short and relied on the overwhelming superiority of the coalition armies in terms of technology and firepower. Fred Halliday defines the Gulf War as a *colonial war* with an *enormous imbalance of technology and casualties*.²⁷⁵ Between January 16, the start of the operations against Iraqi forces, and February 24, the coalition forces carried out a prolonged air campaign, which weakened Iraqi positions and the already low morale of Iraqi

²⁷¹ Finlan (2003). *The Gulf War 1991*, p. 11.

²⁷² Tripp (2007). *A History of Iraq*, p. 245. Finlan (2003). *The Gulf War 1991*, p. 38. Alnasrawi (2001). *Iraq: economic sanctions and consequences*, p. 209. Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 165.

²⁷³ Finlan (2003). *The Gulf War 1991*, pp. 18, 19.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁷⁵ Halliday (1994). *The Gulf War 1990-1991 and the study of international relations*, p. 117.

troops. On February 24, the ground operations started, and only four days later, on February 28, the coalition declared a ceasefire, later ratified by the UN on March 2. A considerable number of Iraqi troops were captured, and the others fled towards Iraq, to Basra in particular, in a disastrous retreat.²⁷⁶

The war, just like the one with Iran, was particularly burdensome on the Southern provinces of Iraq. Most of the coalition's bombardments hit the South, where much of the country's oil refineries were located. At the same time, coalition troops moved north from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and entered Iraq from the South.²⁷⁷ Again, the Shi'a in South Iraq bore the most loss from the war.²⁷⁸ The Basra governorate is the one where almost every family had a member killed either during the 1991 War or the subsequent uprising.²⁷⁹ At the end of February 1991, we find a situation in Iraq where almost 100.000 Iraqi troops had fled to Basra, already demoralized by the choice to go to war with Kuwait.²⁸⁰ This sentiment resulted in the quick surrender or withdrawal of the Iraqi Army. The low morale grew worse with the swift defeat at the hands of the US-led coalition, and it added to the discontent of the Iraqi troops after the long war with Iran. Finally, the bulk of the Iraqi Army came from the more populous regions of southern Iraq, which had suffered the most from the Iraq-Iran War. They were also the ones suffering the most from the Coalition attacks. All these conditions summed up with the idea that the Regime was weak and defeated by the US-led attacks, creating the perfect conditions for a rebellion, and that is precisely what happened in March 1991 with the *Intifada Sha'abaniyya*.

1.2.3 The 1991 Intifada, its Repression, and Sadr's First Political Engagement.

The return of the disbanded Iraqi forces from Kuwait, bringing home grievances and the news of the defeat, found fertile ground in a population tired of years of war and

²⁷⁶ Tripp reports how much of the coalition bombardments on Iraq targeted the country's civil infrastructures, paving the way for the severe crisis of the 90s, also fuelled by the UN sanctions. In six weeks of bombardment, more damage was made to Iraq's economic infrastructure than in eight years of war with Iran. Tripp (2007). *A History of Iraq*, pp. 245, 251. Sakai (2003). *The 1991 Intifada in Iraq*, p. 160.

²⁷⁷ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 128.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 142.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 143.

²⁸⁰ Khoury, Dina Rizk (2021). *The 1991 Intifada in Three Keys: Writing the History of Violence* in Tejel, Jordi and Bocco, Riccardo and Sluglett Peter. *Writing the Modern History of Iraq: Historiographical and Political Challenges*. World Scientific, pp. 245 – 267.

oppression and set off a rebellion in all the southern provinces of the country.²⁸¹ The uprising, by all accounts, began spontaneously and was fueled by all the resentments of the war generation, the majority of whom rebelled in 1991.²⁸² The *Intifada* took root, particularly in Southern and Central Iraq, again areas heavily hit by the war with Iran and the recent Operation Desert Storm.²⁸³ The retreating members of the Army, many of whom were affiliated with the Ba'ath Party, were soon joined in their rebellion by both the local population of the South and by a small number of exiled Islamists crossing the border from Iran.²⁸⁴ Jabbar talks about a few thousand SCIRI's Badr Brigade members crossing into Iraq from Iran across the southern porous border and moving toward Najaf, Karbala, and Baṣrah (Basra).²⁸⁵ The rebels mainly used weapons they had with them as members of the Army or, for the general population, weapons given by the Regime to fight the coalition's attack or that they looted from Ba'ath Commands across the country.²⁸⁶

The *Intifada* started in Basra and swiftly expanded to the Southern provinces of Dī al-Qār, Maysān (al-ʿAmārah), and Muṭannā. On the fourth day of the uprising, the rebellion reached Najaf and Karbala. Within a week since its beginning on March 1, all eight governorates south of Baghdad were in open rebellion, and even in the capital, demonstrations broke out in Kāẓimiyyah and Madina Saddam. At the same time, the uprising also spread in the Kurdish northern region. The Regime launched repressive military actions against the rebels one week after the start of the rebellion. However, the repression intensified after 10 days, leading to the use of aviation and missiles to retake cities from the rebels.²⁸⁷ Al-Khu'i called for the US for assistance, but it was refused, even though the international community encouraged Iraqis to rebel.²⁸⁸ This refusal was seen as a green light by the Regime to put down violently the rebellion; the Regime used helicopters, as a No-Fly

²⁸¹ Ibid. p. 246.

²⁸² *In one decade, Iraq waged two massive wars in which a whole generation was trapped. Both wars and the uprisings that followed in 1991 wreaked unprecedented havoc and left Iraq a destitute, torn, isolated nation. The war generation paid a heavy price. It bore the brunt of casualties at the war front, suffered the perils of the uprisings, and was entangled in the violence of the rebellion on both sides of the national divide.* Abdul Jabbar, (2004). *The War Generation in Iraq*, p. 125.

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 134. Abdul Jabbar, Faleh (2010). Clerics, Tribes, Ideologues and Urban Dwellers in the South of Iraq: the Potential for Rebellion. *The Adelphi Papers*, Vol. 43, pp. 161 – 178, p. 176.

²⁸⁴ Abdul Jabbar, (2004). *The War Generation in Iraq*, p. 134.

²⁸⁵ Abdul Jabbar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, p. 270.

²⁸⁶ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 128. Interview with Doctor Abbas al-Faham, Najaf (11/06/2024).

²⁸⁷ Sakai (2003). *The 1991 Intifada in Iraq*, pp. 158, 159.

²⁸⁸ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 121.

zone was imposed by the Coalition forces on Central and Southern Iraq, like in the Kurdish region.²⁸⁹

Even though the rebellion was generally spontaneous and lacked any central leadership, also due to the fragmentation of the various components of the Intifada and rivalry among these components – for instance, SCIRI members' Khomeinist slogans alienated many potential allies – and the rebellious divisions of the Army incapability of giving itself a political direction, certain cities organized some forms of provisory government.²⁹⁰

In Najaf, in particular, after the beginning of the demonstration against the Regime and the sack of the Ba'ath Command of the city, along with the Police station and the Army Command,²⁹¹ to avoid the spread of the looming chaos in the town, Ayatollah al-Khu'i, the marja' al-ā'alā, formed a committee to govern the city and published a controversial *fatwa/bayan* calling for people to maintain order and respect private and public (government's) property.²⁹² Detractors of Ayatollah al-Khu'i find in the *fatwa* proof of the lack of support from the marja'a for the revolt and his siding with the Regime.²⁹³ Instead, his supporters see this *fatwa* as proof that al-Khu'i was invested in building an alternative government to the Regime's one in Najaf and of his responsible behavior regarding preserving private and public property. He had also previously published a *fatwa* prohibiting soldiers invading Kuwait from looting goods in the country.²⁹⁴ The committee formed by al-Khu'i comprises many of the most important Ulama of Najaf, many members of the family Bahr al-Ulum and al-Khu'i's son, Muhammad Taqi al-Khu'i, and tries to keep order in the town by creating a sort of informal police, groups of armed people guarding public order and preventing crimes. This provisory administration of Najaf lasted only a couple of weeks, as the Regime counter-attacks and retook the city in two days of fighting, using brutal methods, firing into residential neighborhoods with tanks and missiles.²⁹⁵ The Regime's

²⁸⁹ Sakai (2003). *The 1991 Intifada in Iraq*, p. 159.

²⁹⁰ Abdul Jabar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, pp. 270, 271.

²⁹¹ Interview with Doctor Abbas al-Faham, Najaf (11/06/2024).

²⁹² Interview with Sayyid M., Najaf (29/05/2024). The text of the *fatwa* is available online at the website, along with the declaration of the formation of the Governing Committee in Najaf and the names of those chosen to take part in the Committee: <https://www.alkhoei.net/ar/Document/34/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82>.

Mauriello, (2011). *Descendants of the Family of the Prophet in Contemporary History*, p. 76.

²⁹³ al-Simrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marğa'iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 75. He states that al-Khoei supported the 1991 uprising openly and was subject to great pressure for this. Tripp, (2007). *A History of Iraq*, p. 246. Tripp also states that al-Khoei supported the rebellion, but only after a great deal of pressure from rebels.

²⁹⁴ Mauriello (2011). *Descendants of the Family of the Prophet in Contemporary History*, p. 76.

²⁹⁵ Interview with Sayyid M., Najaf (29/05/2024). Interview with Doctor Abbas al-Faham, Najaf (11/06/2024).

forces rounded up men in Najaf calling from helicopters with loudspeakers, rounding them up in a square and arresting most of them. Most of the people arrested on this occasion never returned, and their remains were found after the fall of the Regime in mass graves around Najaf.²⁹⁶

Ayatollah al-Khu'i was arrested on March 20, along with others 'ulama considered to be leaders of the revolt. He was brought to Baghdad and forced to declare his support for the Regime and condemn the uprising on national television with Saddam.²⁹⁷ Al-Khu'i was released shortly after this and was placed under house arrest.²⁹⁸ Along with al-Khu'i, also Sayyid Muhammad al-Sadr, the future leader of the Sadrist movement, was arrested and forced to declare his support for the Regime and his condemnation of the revolts both by Radio and in a newspaper article in one of the Regime's outlets, the newspaper *al-Tawrah* (See documents n. 1, 2) where he declares that the rebels were people unknown to the citizens of Najaf and were a "demagogic mob," using the exact words used by al-Khui in his condemnation of the Intifada and, thus, clearly following a Regime-dictated message to describe what it saw as *Ṣafḥah al-ḥiyānah wa al-ġadr* (The Events of Treason and Disloyalty) (See document n. 3).²⁹⁹

Sadr's participation in the Intifada is a point of contention between his supporters and his detractors. According to the historians close to the Movement and Muhammad al-Sadr's biographers, this revolt was the moment when the founder and leader of Sadristism took again an interest in politics.³⁰⁰ Thus, according to this narrative, this could be marked as the symbolic founding moment of the Sadrist Movement.

Nevertheless, the sources offer a contradictory account of Sadr's role in these events. al-Sīmrī (al-Simri) and al-Ṭā'ī (al-Ta'i) highlight how Sadr played a central role in the Intifada.³⁰¹ Al-Nağğār (al-Najjar) even states that rebels in Najaf went to him in search of a leader after Ayatollah Abu al-Qassem al-Khoei (Abū al-Qāssem al-Ḥū'ī) appeared too moderate.³⁰² At the same time, oral sources outline Sadr's active participation in the Intifada,

²⁹⁶ Interview with Sayyid M., Najaf (29/05/2024).

²⁹⁷ Sakai (2003). *The 1991 Intifada in Iraq*, p. 159.

²⁹⁸ Mauriello (2011). *Descendants of the Family of the Prophet in Contemporary History*, p. 76.

²⁹⁹ Sakai (2003). *The 1991 Intifada in Iraq*, p. 159.

³⁰⁰ al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*. al-Sīmrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marġa 'iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 75.

³⁰¹ al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 439. al-Sīmrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marġa 'iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 75.

³⁰² Al-Nağğār, Hānī Ġawād Kāzim (2018). *Al-Mašrū' al-Siyāsī wa al-Iğtimā'ī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr* (The Political and Social Project of Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr). Dār al-Qārī', pp. 62, 63.

depicting him as the only religious leader in Najaf willing to support the rebels openly.³⁰³ According to al-Ta'i, Muhammad al-Sadr was already holding congregational prayer without giving sermons. In these prayers, Sadr allegedly called for the worshipers to support the rebels with weapons, money, and fighting men.³⁰⁴ Al-Ta'i also states that hawza students supporting al-Sadr were disbanded, and he was again banned from teaching, even though we do not know for how long.³⁰⁵ These sources support at least the fact that Sadr took a clear stance in favor of the uprising; if not the leadership in the revolt, we find his declaration to support the rebellion.³⁰⁶

In the declaration in the main square in Najaf, in front of Imam Ali Sanctuary, Sadr openly supported the revolt. He defined it as “*an Islamic Revolution in our beloved land of Iraq*” after long and hard years of social, economic, and political injustice, persecution, and degradation from both internal and external forces. Oral sources also point to photographic evidence of Sadr’s presence in Imam Ali Sanctuary during the revolt. Still, the photo is difficult to date and contextualize ([See picture n. 2](#)).³⁰⁷ Even though we can not know through this declaration how significant Sadr’s role was in the *Intifada*, we understand his open support for it and his clear stance in favor of the revolt.

Other sources, though, do not provide any support for these accounts. In the Ba’ath Party Records, we do not find traces of Muhammad al-Sadr or his followers’ role during the uprising. This void might be due to the lack of Regime intelligence highlighted by Blaydes during the period of the *Intifada*.³⁰⁸

Even though there are no direct accounts of Sadr’s participation in the 1991 Uprising in the Ba’ath Archives, we find many references in the Ba’ath Archives to the defiant activities led by rebels in the areas that would later become strongholds of Sadrism. In the first days of March 1991, reports from the Party Branch in Madina Saddam showed that weapons were being stocked and prepared in the area.³⁰⁹ In the area of Nassiriyya, a member

³⁰³ Interview with Sayyid A. M., Dearborn (04/06/2023).

³⁰⁴ al-Ṭā’ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 439.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 440.

³⁰⁶ <https://tinyurl.com/myzv4pk2>. This recording is the only available recording that we could find of Muhammad al-Sadr’s declaration of March 1991 concerning the *Intifada*. The link was provided by Sayyid A. M. during our interview in Dearborn on 04/06/2023 while discussing Sadr’s involvement with the 1991 *Intifada*. Also, Sheikh Muhammad al-Ya’cubi confirms Sadr’s involvement in the uprising in this interview: <https://tinyurl.com/yjfn99b>.

³⁰⁷ Interview with Sayyid A. Z., Najaf (28 – 30/11/2023).

³⁰⁸ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, pp. 131, 132.

³⁰⁹ BRCC 024-5-2-0038 (12/03/91).

of the Ba'ath was captured by rebels at the end of March 1991.³¹⁰ Reports from the Ba'ath Party also noticed that many of the people who took part in the revolts came from a tribal background, highlighting again the central role of the tribes in Iraqi politics.³¹¹

An analysis of the significant Lebanese newspapers reveals a similar lack of accounts of Sadr's role in the 1991 Uprising.³¹² Having analyzed all foreign affairs sections from March, April, May, and June 1991, no mention of Sadr's role during the *Intifada* in Iraq was found. Still, the same newspapers all reported in February 1999 news of Muhammad al-Sadr's death, meaning that news from Iraq and the country's internal affairs were not altogether ignored, thus questioning again the centrality of Sadr's role in the *Intifada*.

Besides Sadr's actual role in the *Intifada*, all sources attribute great importance to this event in Sadr's political awakening. Thus, Sadr's supporters struggle to place him at the center of these events.³¹³ Such a centrality is given by the widespread participation and the profound consequences of this rebellion and its repression of Iraqi society.

According to Jabbar's analysis, among those who rebelled in the Army, we find different groups: those who rebelled and mutinied (in the South), those who passively deserted (in Kurdistan), and those who fought alongside the Regime through the rebellion (in central Iraq). These divisions depended on the level of destruction the different areas were subjected to and the clanic and kinship connections of different groups to the Regime. The Southern regions of Iraq suffered a higher level of destruction.³¹⁴ In her research about the 1991 Intifada, Khoury notes that relatives of people whom the Regime previously executed had a central role in organizing and supporting the 1991 Uprising.³¹⁵ This information would confirm a pattern that sees people already "punished" by the Regime as more likely to rise again against it, and as we shall see later on, this pattern also works for some of Sadr's supporters. Nevertheless, many Iraqis did not take part in the uprising; some

³¹⁰ BRCC 024-5-2-0160 (24/03/91).

³¹¹ BRCC 039-1-6-0238 (1991).

³¹² Al-Safir and al-Nahār, issues from March to May 1991 and from the 19th of February 1999 to the 25th of February 1999. The newspapers are available at the Library of the American University of Beirut.

³¹³ Blaydes states that Sadr's popularity exploded after the 1991 Uprising. This may imply that he had a prominent role in the Revolt and thus became popular in the aftermath. Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 340. Entirely on another line, Tripp defines Sadr as *by no means a public critic of the regime*. Tripp (2007). *A History of Iraq*, p. 265.

³¹⁴ Abdul Jabar, (2004). *The War Generation in Iraq*, pp. 133, 134.

³¹⁵ Khoury (2012). *The 1991 Intifada in Three Keys*, p. 254.

remained loyal to the government, while many just stayed home, fearing the Regime's repression.³¹⁶

The 1991 *Intifada* lasted a few weeks (from the beginning of March to the start of April) but led to a bloody repression of the rebels, which left deep scars on Iraqi society.³¹⁷ This event brought disruption to Iraqi lives as many insurgents were killed, and their families were later subject to collective punishments by the Regime.³¹⁸

Balydes argues that the fact that the Uprising took place in predominantly Shi'a regions does not mean that all the Shi'a participated in the uprising and that the community acted as one, as they had different political affiliations.³¹⁹ Nevertheless, the following repression that hit indiscriminately the whole South for the *Intifada* helped to cement a more cohesive identity for the Shi'a community, forged by adversities.³²⁰ During the repression and after the Uprising, the Regime lacked accurate information on who took part, organized, and had a central role in the Uprising due to the overrunning by rebels of the Regime's forces and security service in the areas they took control of. This situation led to the impossibility of the Regime's forces to identify and punish only the people who actually took part in the rebellion. Thus, a general and indiscriminate punishment of all the Southern and Central Iraq populations ensued. The repression was brutal. Artillery was used in towns such as Najaf, where people were rounded up and most male members of families arrested, independently from their age or their actual involvement in the revolt. Many of those arrested never came back and were found only after 2003 in mass graves.³²¹ Balydes reports numbers of 30.000 killed within three weeks, including women and children, and 70.000 leaving the country.³²²

After the end of the Uprising, the population of Southern and Central Iraq was targeted to get information and confessions, focusing on Shi'a families suspected of anti-regime activities and with connection to previous rebellions, such as those in 1977 or 1979.³²³ People were arrested and disappeared, even among those who had no direct involvement with the Uprising.³²⁴ The Regime used family networks to punish individuals thought to be

³¹⁶ Balydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 129. Tripp (2007). *A History of Iraq*, p. 246. Baram, Amatzia (1997). "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991-96." *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 1 – 31.

³¹⁷ Tripp (2007). *A History of Iraq*, p. 246.

³¹⁸ Ibid., p. 256.

³¹⁹ Balydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 130.

³²⁰ Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*.

³²¹ Interview Sayyid M., Najaf (29/05/2024).

³²² Balydes (2018), *State of Repression*, pp. 131, 132.

³²³ Interview with Hajj Q. Kadehm Sweheili, by phone (29/04/2024).

³²⁴ Balydes (2018), *State of Repression*, pp. 132, 133.

involved in the uprising or anti-regime activities. The repression aimed at Shi'a indiscriminately led to a change in the political behaviors of the community. At the same time, the targeting of the families led to a mobilization of tribal networks against the Regime.³²⁵ In turn, such a situation also led to an increasing Regime's surveillance of Southern and Central regions of Iraq in fear of future uprisings.³²⁶ The general repression against most of the population of Southern Iraq, which was mainly composed of Shi'a, following the 1991 *Intifada* strengthened and deepened the confessional divisions in Iraq, as the repression itself focused on sectarian divisions, with bombardments of the Shi'a holy Shrines and murals painted such as *There will be no Shi'a after today*.³²⁷ Helfont argues that the repression of the 1991 *intifada* was not carried out on a sectarian basis,³²⁸ but the fact that it hit almost exclusively the Shi'a population remains.

Furthermore, while the Regime might have tried to avoid explicit sectarian policies or terminology in its documents, this does not mean that sectarian behaviors were not adopted on the ground. This repression hit the same confessional divisions already hit by the burden of the war effort shouldered by the communities of Southern Iraq and by the repression against Islamists that primarily interested Southern and Central Iraqi communities. The shattering of a larger national discourse brought back to the foreground tribal, clanic, and sectarian identities, which came to play a central role in the 1990s politics in the country.³²⁹

As we highlighted, the uprising was quickly crushed in a swift transition by the Regime from the external attack on Kuwait to internal repression against rebels, as stated by Tripp. This transition also shifted attention from the crushing defeat in Kuwait to the danger of internal enemies, helping the Iraqi Regime survive the consequences of its disastrous defeat in Kuwait.³³⁰

³²⁵ Ibid., p. 133.

³²⁶ CRRRC Doc. No. SH-RVCC-D-000-610, February 1992. Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 134.

³²⁷ Abdul Jabar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, p. 271. Interview with Doctor Abbas al-Faham, Najaf (11/06/2024).

³²⁸ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 121.

³²⁹ Kubba, Laith (2004). *Iraqi Shia Politics*. In Potter, G. Lawrence and Sick, G. Gary. *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 141 – 151, pp. 141, 142.

³³⁰ Tripp (2007). *A History of Iraq*, pp. 246, 247. Tripp also noticed that the international community did nothing to stop Saddam's brutal repression of the Uprising. He explains this behaviour with the idea that it was still preferred to have a strong man in power backed by the bulk of the armed forces than a breakdown that would possibly favour Iran. Peter and Marion Sluglett follow a similar interpretation. Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett (2001). *Iraq Since 1958*, p. 290.

1.2.4 The UN Sanctions and their Impact on Iraq in the 1990s.

From the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, other than from the 1991 Intifada, also the UN sanctions were triggered, as we briefly mentioned, on August 6, 1990;³³¹ supported primarily by the US and the UK, they were some of the strictest sanctions of the second half of the 20th century, carried throughout the whole decade and beyond notwithstanding the horrific human cost on Iraqi society and the general lack of decisive consequences for the Regime.³³²

As we have seen, the war effort against Iran had already weakened Iraq's economy, creating a difficult economic situation at the end of the 1980s.³³³ On top of this, Sanctions were imposed on Iraq as a consequence of the invasion of Kuwait, an attempt made also to try and restore the shattered Iraqi economy by seizing Kuwait's oil fields.³³⁴ The first sanctions were imposed with UN Security Council resolution 661, which basically tried to cut Iraq off from the world economy, as described by Alnasrawi. *The sanctions included a ban on all trade, an oil embargo, a freezing of Iraqi government financial assets abroad, an arms embargo, suspension of international flights, and banned financial transactions. The UNSC also called upon member states to enforce naval and air blockades against Iraq. All shipping on the Shatt-al-Arab waterway in the south of Iraq was intercepted and all vessels approaching the Jordanian port of Aqaba were boarded and inspected.*³³⁵ Between 70% and 80% of the total caloric intake of the Iraqi population relied on imported food; this determined a sharp price increase, ranging from 200% to 1800% in the first few months of the blockade.³³⁶ Food rationing was implemented as early as September 1, 1990.³³⁷

Shortly after this, the aerial campaign of bombardment by the US-led coalition, as we have seen, hit Iraq, dealing terrible damage to Iraq's infrastructures and amplifying the

³³¹ Baram, Amatzia (2000). "The Effect of Iraqi Sanctions: Statistical Pitfalls and Responsibility." *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 2, pp. 194-223. Arno Anthony (ed.) (2000). *Iraq Under Siege. The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War*. Cambridge: South End Press. Graham-Brown, Sarah (1999). *Sanctioning Saddam. The Politics of Intervention in Iraq*. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers.

³³² Halliday (1999). *The Impact of the UN Sanctions on the People of Iraq*. pp. 29-37. Mack, Andrew and Khan, Asif (2000). *The Efficacy of UN Sanctions*. Security Dialogue, Vol. 31 N. 3, pp. 279 – 292.

³³³ Alnasrawi, Abbas (2001). *Iraq: economic sanctions and consequences, 1990–2000*. Third World Quarterly Vol. 22 N. 2, 205-218, p. 206.

³³⁴ Ibid., p. 208.

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 208. Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 164.

³³⁶ Ibid., p. 167.

³³⁷ Alnasrawi (2001). *Iraq: economic sanctions and consequences, 1990–2000*, p. 208.

consequences of economic sanctions, as it was explicitly intended by the air campaign launched by the US.³³⁸

In April 1991, resolution 687 was adopted by the UN Security Council, setting the terms for lifting the sanctions and modifying a few conditions of the previous resolution 661. The lifting of the sanctions was linked to the boundaries setting for Iraq, the destruction of its Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), and the acceptance of monitoring over its weapons and its weapons production capabilities, also including its nuclear program. Furthermore, Iraq was allowed to import food but had no funds to buy it since it could not export its oil; thus, this modification did not improve Iraq's situation.³³⁹

The Sanctions Committee had not recognized the need to send food to Iraq at the end of 1990 and the beginning of 1991; thus, the crisis had worsened. This dire need was recognized only in March 1991, but since Iraq had no funds to import foodstuffs, this need was unmet.³⁴⁰

The UN proposed the first Oil for Food program between August and September 1992, with resolutions 706 and 712. However, this proposal was refused by the Iraqi Government, probably because the program implied that all the Iraqi funds coming from oil revenues would be under UN control, thus giving up part of Iraq's economic sovereignty. The proposition was again brought forth by the UN with resolution 986 in 1995, but the Iraqi Regime refused again, plunging Iraq's economy into an even more profound crisis. A few months later, in 1996, the Iraqi government accepted the program as defined by resolution 986. Even though the program provided some relief to Iraq, it failed to solve the problem of scarcity of food, medicines, and other goods.³⁴¹

The Sanctions had a disastrous effect on Iraq, bringing to the death of 1.5 million people, including 500.000 children,³⁴² and bringing back Iraq's economy of 50 years. The GDP of Iraq during the 1990s was lower than in the 1950s.³⁴³ Balydes has defined the

³³⁸ Gellman, Barton (23/06/1991). *Allied Air War Struck Broadly in Iraq. Officials Acknowledge Strategy Went Beyond Purely Military Targets.* The Washington Post (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/06/23/allied-air-war-struck-broadly-in-iraq/e469877b-b1c1-44a9-bfe7-084da4e38e41/>). Hiro, Dilip (1992). *Desert Shield to Desert Storm: The Second Gulf War*. New York: Routledge.

³³⁹ Alnasrawi (2001). *Iraq: economic sanctions and consequences, 1990–2000*, p. 210.

³⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 212.

³⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 212, 213.

³⁴² Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 163.

³⁴³ Alnasrawi (2001). *Iraq: economic sanctions and consequences, 1990–2000*, p. 214.

sanctions as an *invisible war* on Iraq that continued silently after the 1990-1991 Gulf War throughout the whole decade.³⁴⁴

Still, the sanctions did not bend the Iraqi Regime but had a double effect; on the one hand, they weakened the Iraqi State, diminishing its welfare capabilities. Many State employees were not paid for months, many were laid off while the State could also not maintain the large army mobilized, and as many as 600.000 soldiers had to be demobilized.³⁴⁵ On the other hand, the sanction helped tighten the Regime's grip on Iraqi society, as aid coming through the UN and the program "Oil for Food" was distributed by the Regime. They were used as a political weapon.³⁴⁶ The distribution of aid helped the government to increase control over the population, as they gathered information on people and could use the distribution as a blackmail tool to force people into cooperation, making them dependent on the Regime's rations or special distributions carried out by the Ba'ath.³⁴⁷ Rohde argues that *the increasing dependence of most Iraqis on a government-run food rationing system actually strengthened state power vis-à-vis the weakened Iraqi society and created considerable breathing space for the regime.*³⁴⁸

Khoury also highlights that people who took part in the 1991 Intifada or their families were consequently denied access to resources by the Regime, primarily through the redistribution of rations through the sanctions-ridden 1990s.³⁴⁹ Rations were accessible using a Regime-issued card, available after providing some information, among which security information; thus, any family with members that had a history of dissent with the Regime or did not complete the military service had difficulties accessing the ration card.³⁵⁰

Similarly, Blaydes notices that the effects of the sanctions were not evenly distributed among the Iraqi population and remarks how areas that suffered particularly from bad health and had a lower rate of caloric intake were also areas where non-cooperative behaviors took

³⁴⁴ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 163.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 166.

³⁴⁶ Although the distribution of rations gave a new tool of control over the Iraqi people to the Regime, sanctions also forced it to change its structure, reducing some of its formal services to the population (and thus leaving a space for informal networks of help and relief, such as the Sadrist network), giving space to illicit activities and contraband, even if still controlled by individuals close to the Regime. Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 176. Mack and Khan (2000). *The Efficacy of UN Sanctions*, p. 282.

³⁴⁷ Alnasrawi (2001). *Iraq: economic sanctions and consequences, 1990–2000*, p. 213. Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, pp. 168, 169.

³⁴⁸ Rohde, Achim (2010). *State-Society Relations in Ba'athist Iraq: Facing Dictatorship*. New York: Routledge Press, p. 68.

³⁴⁹ Tripp (2007). *A History of Iraq*, p. 256. Cortright, David and Lopez, George A. (1999). "Are Sanctions Just? The Problematic Case of Iraq." *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 52, No. 2, Seeking International Justice The Role of Institutions, pp. 735-755, pp. 743, 744.

³⁵⁰ Graham-Brown (1999). *Sanctioning Saddam*, 169.

place with the Regime.³⁵¹ For instance, southern provinces like Basra, Muthanna, and Karbala have a more significant percentage of underweight people than Sunni areas like Anbār and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. However, also between Sunni provinces, we find significant differences; for instance, the rate of malnourished people in Anbar was higher than in Salah al-Din.³⁵² However, this distribution points to a more profound impact of sanctions on southern regions of Iraq, just like it happened for the consequences of the Iran-Iraq war and the Gulf War.

A glimpse into life in Iraq in the 1990s through the Ba'ath Records shows a particularly difficult situation, especially in some parts of Iraq. These problematic conditions are recognized in internal Party documents exchanged between the local Party branch and the central command. These reports show that the Ba'ath Party was well aware of the situation and, on the one hand, tried to exploit it to push for the lifting of the UN sanctions. On the other hand, it mobilized its resources to counter the situation according to its political interests.³⁵³

In the peripheral area of Madina Saddam, a new neighborhood built by the Qassem (Qāsem) Regime just after the fall of the Hashemite Monarchy to accommodate the new immigrants from the countryside to the capital, lack of running water and electricity was often reported.³⁵⁴ The lack of electricity led to the impossibility of pumping water or operating the sewage system, harming the functioning of hospitals.³⁵⁵ Reports indicate a general sanitary crisis in Baghdad, probably fuelled by the sanctions and the lack of medicines.³⁵⁶ Such a crisis brought the risk of spreading diseases, such as typhoid and cholera, which were very low before the 1990s.³⁵⁷ The Regime's surveillance spotted pharmacies selling Iranian medications, highlighting the lack of access to drugs in Iraq and

³⁵¹ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 164.

³⁵² Ibid., p. 175.

³⁵³ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0733 (25/04/99). The Ba'ath even reports on foreign publications mobilizing against the sanctions, showing its high interest in this direction. Furthermore, the Ba'ath is interested in solving Iraqi citizens' problems caused by the sanctions as it is well aware of the fact that its political opponents might exploit these problems, as we shall see.

³⁵⁴ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0352 (05/06/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0320 (21/03/99). Madinah Saddam, previously known as Madina al-Thawra and after the fall of Saddam Hussain, Madinah al-Sadr is a neighborhood in the northeast of Baghdad. It was a development project first built by the Qassem regime to house the massive waves of immigrants from the countryside to the capital. It was a stronghold of the Iraqi Communist Party, and later on, it became a Sadrist stronghold, as it is still nowadays. Its connections to the countryside and its tribal reality had a great impact during the UN sanctions in the 1990s.

³⁵⁵ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, pp. 165, 166.

³⁵⁶ BRCC 037-3-4-0506 (05/07/99).

³⁵⁷ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 166.

the smuggling network between Iraq and Iran, which was a central worry for the Iraqi Regime, as we will see later.³⁵⁸

Apart from being reported by the Party branches, these conditions also stimulated an active response by the Party, which was aware of the potential adverse effects of this situation on the Iraqi population, feeding grievances and providing propaganda material to its opponents. In a document from the Summer of 1999, the Party branch of Madinah Saddam points out how the Regime's enemy could exploit the situation to attack the government.³⁵⁹ The report highlights all malfunctioning public services, referring to instruction and sanity. Furthermore, and very interestingly, it also highlights the fallback of citizens towards tribal networks for support in this time of crisis.³⁶⁰ This fallback would point to the continuous centrality of tribal connections to Iraqi society and explain both Sadr and the Regime's interest in obtaining the cooperation of these networks and tribal leaders that we will investigate in the following chapters.³⁶¹

In response to these difficulties, the Regime circulated internal guidelines stating that efforts to solve the lack of services in Madina Saddam must be seriously undertaken.³⁶² The Ba'ath started implementing social activities in Madina Saddam.³⁶³ In particular, a committee was formed to create social and sports activities for young people to give them "more possibilities," focusing specifically on Madina Saddam.³⁶⁴

At the same time, oral sources confirm the dire situation in Iraq during the 1990s, with food shortages and a lack of medicines and electricity.³⁶⁵ In general, other than the difficult living conditions, many of the interviewees report the sensation that under the sanctions, the

³⁵⁸ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0371 (04/99).

³⁵⁹ BRCC 037-3-4-0506 (05/07/99).

³⁶⁰ *The void that it [The Iraqi Communist Party] left was quickly filled by the Baathist State at first, and by tribal and religious solidarity networks during the blockade (1991-2003) that was marked by a partial fall of the Baathist State and its services.* From this short quote from Faleh's work on the Iraqi Communist Party, we see how tribal and religious solidarity networks played a central role in Iraq in the 1990s. Faleh, Abdul al-Jabar, (2010). *The Iraqi Communist Party*. Press de l'Ifpo. (<https://books.openedition.org/ifpo/1111?lang=it#bibliography>).

³⁶¹ BRCC 037-3-4-0390 (18/02/99). The document, along with reports of a fatwa from Ualma in Najaf and Karbala permitting to killing of Americans and British invaders, are present attestation of loyalty by tribal leaders to the Ba'ath Party in a possible invasion. Along with the Regime's interest in tribal loyalty, we point to Sadr's text "The Laws of the Tribes", showing his interest in involvement with clanic life and costumes in Iraq. Pamphlets extracted from this text were distributed in Southern Iraq as well. Another strong sign of Sadr's interest in tribal networks.

³⁶² BRCC 01_2982_0000_0247 (1997). These documents date from 1997, showing a long-term interest by the Regime in Madinah Saddam.

³⁶³ BRCC 037-3-4-0499, 0501, 0502 (15-21/07/99).

³⁶⁴ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0393.

³⁶⁵ Interview with Doctor Abbas al-Faham, Najaf (11/06/2024)

Iraqi state grew weaker in its welfare capabilities but remained pervasive and robust in its policing and control capabilities.³⁶⁶ As Sassoon explained, the UN sanctions weakened the Iraqi state. At the same time, the Ba'ath Party, its repressive capabilities, and its power to mobilize symbolical support were much less hit by them.³⁶⁷

1.2.5 The Death of al-Khu'i and the Struggle to Control the Hawza.

On August 8, 1992, another event that would shape the 1990s decade in Iraq took place. The 92-year-old revered leader of the Najafi hawza and marja' al-taqlid (source of emulation) for many Shi'a, even beyond Iraq's borders, Abu al-Qasem al-Khu'i, died of old age and sickness in Najaf. He had been placed under house arrest by the Ba'ath Regime after his arrest and forced condemnation of the 1991 Intifada in March of the same year. As highlighted by Corboz, his death opened a crisis of succession for the role of marja' al-a'ala in the hawza of Najaf.³⁶⁸ Al-Khu'i had become the most influential figure in Najaf's seminars after the death of Muhsin al-Hakim in June 1970. During his 22 years as the head of the hawza, al-Khu'i taught many students who would later become essential Shi'i scholars, such as Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, or Ali Sistani.³⁶⁹ In such a period, he was the uncontested leader of the Najafi hawza, and his death left a power vacuum that many tried to fill. One first attempt was to put another senior cleric, Ayatollah Gulpaygani (1899 – 1993), in al-Khu'i's place, chosen chiefly for his seniority.³⁷⁰ However, Gulpāygānī was based in Qom, and given the rivalry between the hawza in Qom and Najaf and the fact that he passed away in December 1993, this was not a popular solution. At the same time, most Iraqi Shi'a, also due to the aforementioned rivalry, turned to the most senior cleric in Najaf, Ayatollah Sibzawārī (1910 – 1993), who also died in 1993 in August. Finally,

³⁶⁶ Interview with Hajj Q. Qasem al-Shweili, by phone (29/04/2024). Interview with Sayyid M., Najaf (29/05/2024). Interview with Doctor Abbas al-Faham, Najaf (11/06/2024).

³⁶⁷ Sassoon, Joseph (August 2011). "Review of State-Society Relations in Ba'thist Iraq," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol, 43, No. 3, p. 561. Faust (2015). *The Ba'athification of Iraq*, p. 66.

³⁶⁸ Corboz, Elvire (2016) *Guardians of Shi'ism: Sacred Authority and Transnational Family Networks*. Edinburgh University Press, p. 89.

³⁶⁹ Al-Jibouri (1992). "A Brief Biography in Memory of His Late Holiness Ayatullah al-Uzma Sayyid Abul-Qasim al-Khui."

³⁷⁰ Corboz (2016) *Guardians of Shi'ism*, p. 89.

another candidate, officially supported by the Iranian Regime, Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Arākī (1894 – 1994), died in November 1994.³⁷¹ These events quickly reopened the crisis.

While most historians of this period recognize Ali Sistani, a former student of al-Khu’i and member of his entourage, as becoming the most important and followed religious authority after this crisis of succession between 1992 and 1993,³⁷² this might be a post-2003 reading of history.³⁷³ Interviews with clerics closely involved with the al-Khu’i foundation, and thus close to Sistani as well,³⁷⁴ revealed how the Iraqi Regime severely limited Sistani’s outreach in Iraq during the 1990s. According to these sources, Sistani’s representatives in Iraq during the 1990s were scarcely known to the broader Iraqi population, were few, could not do proselytism openly, and Sistani limited himself to teaching in the hawza but shunned all other public activities.³⁷⁵ This account contradicts the assumption that Sistani became Iraq’s most widely followed Marja’. Interviews both with clerics close to Sistani and clerics involved with the *al-Tayyār al-Ṣadrī* in the 1990s seem to point to the fact that Sistani was widely accepted as the most influential marja’ among the senior clerics in the Najafī hawza.³⁷⁶ This fact also meant he had quite a large following among lay Shi’as across Iraq and outside the country, thanks to his connections to Iran through his son-in-law, Ġawad Ṣahristānī (Jawad Shahrestani) (1954 –) and to Sayyid Murtaḍā al-Kašmirī. Through Shahrestani and Kashmiri, Sistani could reach other countries in the Middle East and expand his network of representatives and influence.³⁷⁷ However, it appears clear that during the 1990s, Sistani had limited opportunities, at least inside Iraq,³⁷⁸ to extend his influence and play a part in Iraqi politics, as he did way more actively after 2003.³⁷⁹ It is true that Sistani, even after 2003, always followed a detached approach to politics, living almost in seclusion and indirectly influencing politics.³⁸⁰ However, the 1990s decade did not see this kind of attempt to indirectly influence politics by Sistani, most likely due to the political climate under Saddam’s Regime that did not permit such an approach. Nevertheless, this passive

³⁷¹ Patel (2022). *Order Out of Chaos*, p. 34.

³⁷² Corboz (2016) *Guardians of Shi’ism*, p. 89.

³⁷³ Patel (2022). *Order Out of Chaos*, pp. 33 – 36.

³⁷⁴ Mauriello (2011). *Descendants of the Family of the Prophet in Contemporary History*, pp. 91, 106, 107. Mauriello explores the al-Khoei Foundation’s role in the rise of Ali Sistani as a Marja’.

³⁷⁵ Interview with Sayyid M., Najaf (29/05/2024). Interview with Doctor Abbas al-Faham, Najaf (11/06/2024).

³⁷⁶ Jiyad, Sajad (2023). *God’s Man in Iraq. The Life and Leadership of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani*. The Century Foundation, p. 23.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 24, 26.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

³⁷⁹ Interview with Sayyid M., Najaf (29/05/2024). Interview with Doctor Abbas al-Faham, Najaf (11/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024).

³⁸⁰ Jiyad (2023). *God’s Man in Iraq*, pp. 23-26.

approach followed by Sistani in this period, compared to the active approach by Sadr, highlights the competition for leadership in hawza in the 1990s.

The Ba'ath Regime, other than limiting the possibilities of Sistani, also tried to weigh in on the crisis of succession of the hawza. As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, the Regime had interests and had also tried to control and manipulate the Iraqi religious environment since the 1970s. In 1970, at the death of Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim, it had already tried to impose its candidate, 'Alī Kāshif al-Ġiṭā' (Ali Kashif al-Ghita) (1913 – 1991),³⁸¹ who was known for his relations with the Ba'ath,³⁸² was not recognized by the Najafi scholarly community, the primary way to become marja' al-a'ala. The Regime had difficulties forming and infiltrating members into the high circles of the hawza, as we have seen;³⁸³ thus, it needed somebody who was already part of these circles to use to its advantage. After the death of Ayatollah al-Khu'i in 1992, the Regime was interested in finding a candidate who could be easily controlled and who could represent the "Arab marja'iyya" as opposed to the Persian one.³⁸⁴

The preoccupation for an Arab marja' grew during the 1980s. In October 1983, the Ba'ath Party Organizational Committee, chaired by 'Izzah Ibrāhīm al-Dūrī (1942 – 2020), chose 'Alī Ḥasan 'Abd al-Maġīd (1941 – 2021), as he was the Director of General Security, to investigate the potential threats of the religious gatherings of *Ashura* and *Arbain* during the wartime, that were worrisome phenomena for the Regime since the 1970s, as we have seen. The study strongly highlighted the participation in these ceremonies of Pakistani, Iranian, Indian, and Afghani followers of al-Khu'i, pointing to a problem connected with the presence of foreign scholars and their followers in the hawza.³⁸⁵ This analysis led to the decision to implement a strategy to *contain* al-Khu'i, as noticed by Kadhim, the leader of the hawza and chief representative of this problematic tendency, according to the Ba'ath.³⁸⁶

Consequently, in 1984, another committee was formed to analyze the phenomenon of non-Arab students in the hawza. It was led again by Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri. The committee highlighted al-Khu'i's ambiguous position toward the war and his refusal to condemn the Iranian Regime openly and to publicly support the Iraqi one, both symbolically and

³⁸¹ Corboz, Elvire (2016) *Guardians of Shi'ism*, p. 89.

³⁸² Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, pp. 43, 44, 89.

³⁸³ Ibid., pp. 36, 37.

³⁸⁴ Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza Under Siege*, pp. 14, 16, 25. Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 370.

³⁸⁵ Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza Under Siege*, pp. 17, 18. BRCC 023-4-7 (22/08/84).

³⁸⁶ Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza Under Siege*, p. 19.

materially.³⁸⁷ The documents produced by this committee highlight the importance of forming religious leaders from the Ba'athist ranks, as Helfont has also pointed out, and the difficulties in doing so. It also points out the constant preoccupation of the Regime that the Shi'a in Iraq would form a "fifth column" of the Iranians during the war.³⁸⁸

Yet another committee was held in 1987, and a meeting to discuss the hawza and the religious schools was held. In the meeting, the need to deal with the non-Arab presence in the hawza was expressed, and the main idea was to push for an Arab marja' sympathetic to Ba'athist positions to substitute al-Khu'i.³⁸⁹ In line with this idea, the committee expressed its support for trying to change and influence the curricula of religious schools, limit the use of languages other than Arabic, banning Persian in particular. Nevertheless, it was also highlighted that if al-Khu'i should be deported from Iraq, the hawza, which, according to the committee, was almost entirely made up of foreign cadres, would also move with him outside Iraq and the Regime's reach but continuing to influence Iraqi Shi'a, so making the situation worst.³⁹⁰

One of the committee members, Sa'adūn Šākīr (Sa'adoun Shakir) (1939 – 2015), a Shi'a intellectual from the Ba'ath party cadres, highlighted how substituting the al-Khu'i with Muhammad al-Sadr would have just made things worse, as Sadr was harsher than Khu'i.³⁹¹ This very interesting point would make us consider that Sadr was not the Regime candidate to become the Arab marja'. However, we still have to remember that such a statement was only the opinion of one of the officials in the committee and not the official position or a final decision.

Nevertheless, many studies and sources suggest that the Regime's candidate was Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr. However, we have no sources to confirm an eventual agreement between the Regime's officials and Sadr.³⁹²

Nonetheless, we have circumstantial evidence that probably the Regime might have univocally chosen Sadr as its candidate. As a matter of fact, as we shall see in the following

³⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 20, 21

³⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 22.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 27, 28.

³⁹¹ Ibid., p. 26. "If Muhammad al-Sadr ascended [to the Hawza leadership], **he would have been worse than al-Khoei, because he is harsher than al-Khoei. He would have caused a disaster...**"

³⁹² Kadhim also highlights how it was impossible for the Regime just to choose a marja' and impose it on the hawza since the mechanisms to become marja' al-'ala were far more complicated than just picking a candidate and implied voluntary recognition by peers. Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza Under Siege*, p. 39. In this work, we will highlight the more subtle ways the Iraqi Regime tried to influence this process.

chapters, Sadr, during the 1990s, had the liberty to maneuver far more than any other religious figure from the Shi'i milieu. Such a situation does not necessarily mean there was an agreement or direct cooperation between the Ba'athist Regime and Sadr, as we have no proof of it, but that the Regime could have thought that Sadr might suit its interests.³⁹³ Sadr exploited this situation to further his goals and interests and sideline his concurrence in the hawza.³⁹⁴ This situation allowed Sadr to expand his network as a marja' and the number of his followers, playing a central role in Iraqi politics and expanding his power in the hawza and the Shi'a milieu in the 1990s, contrary to Sistani, which in this period was marginalized. Furthermore, the Regime had also previous experience in using to its own advantage religious figures and discourse, even without their consent or direct involvement, as shown by their use of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's works on Islamic Economics or the famous al-Hakim's *fatwa*, *al-Šiyū'iyah Kafr wa Ilhād*, from 1960, to counter the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) in the early 1960s. Similarly, the Regime also had no hesitation in assassinating a cleric when he was considered too dangerous, as shown again by Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's example, highlighting how the Regime might have benefited from Sadr's presence and work and then assassinated him when he became unmanageable.³⁹⁵

Thus, seeing Sistani as the leader of the hawza in the 1990s is most likely a retrospective reconstruction of what happened in the light of nowadays' Sistani's importance. He had an essential role in the hawza but was in no way the uncontrasted marja' al-a'ala, as Sadr's importance during the 1990s also shows. In that period, also other maraja' had a broad following and could boast strong scholarly credentials, such as Bašīr al-Nağafī (Bashir al-Najafī) (1942 –), Murtdā al-Burūğirdī (1929 – 1998) Mīrzā Ġawād Tabrīzī (1926 – 2006), Waḥīd Ḥurāsānī (1921 –), Taqī Ṭabāṭabā'ī Qomī (1923 – 2016), Mīrzā 'Alī Falsafī (1919 – 2006), 'Alī Beheštī (1906 – 2004), Muḥammad Šādiq Rūḥānī (1926 – 2006), and Muḥammad Ḥussein Faḍlallāh (1935 – 2010).³⁹⁶ While the two main contendants for the

³⁹³ Concerning the possible appointment of Sadr by the Regime, Abdul Jabbar notices: *In the wake of the execution of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, in 1980, a cousin of his, Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, was claimed to have been 'appointed' by the government as an Iraqi marja'...* Keen on preserving and aggravating the ethnic divide within the clerical class, the Ba'th government was in favour of an Arab line of marja'ism. In their eyes, [Grand Ayatullah] Kho'i and his successor [Grand Ayatullah Ali] Sistani were both Persians. The Ba'th government may well have made proxy efforts to create a rival Arab Shi'ite centre. **But Al-Sadr could, practically, neither oppose nor endorse such attempts.** Abdul Jabbar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, p. 183.

³⁹⁴ Jiyad (2023). *God's Man in Iraq*, p. 26.

³⁹⁵ Bengio (1998). *Saddam's Word*, p. 99.

³⁹⁶ Patel (2022). *Order Out of Chaos*, p. 34.

control of the hawza and the title of marja' al-a'ala were Sistani and Sadr, this helps us to have a more nuanced picture of the complete system of the hawza.

Thus, the clarity of succession after al-Khu'i's death became much less certain, leaving a void of power that several people tried to fill.³⁹⁷

1.2.6 The Iraqi Regime's "Faith Campaign" in Iraq and the Middle Eastern Context.

This attempt to place its candidate as the leader of the hawza came amid the beginning of the Regime's "Faith Campaign" (*al-Ḥamlah al-Īmāniyyah*). In June 1993, Saddam announced the start of the "Faith Campaign" with a large ceremony. The campaign had the official goal of spreading Islam, in its Ba'athist interpretation, of course, and using religious discourse to justify Saddam's rule by portraying him as a just Muslim leader. At the same time, the religious rhetoric was used against the Regime's adversaries, like it had been done during the 1980s with Iran, focusing now on Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the US, and Israel. This announcement was followed by a new focus by the Regime on religion, concentrating on religious discourse but also building mosques and financing religious institutions. New laws banning alcohol and limiting the number of bars and nightclubs were also implemented. New punishments for robbery and theft, such as hand amputation, were put in place; deserters were punished by having their ears cut. Women were also prohibited from traveling abroad without a male relative.³⁹⁸ All this was an apparent attempt to reproduce what was seen as Islamic justice and morale.

Even though Helfont states that Islam, in the Ba'athist's conception of it, and the attempt to control it, had always been a central piece of Ba'athist ideology, references to it indeed became much more pervasive in the Regime's rhetoric during the 1990s, as the addition of the phrase "God is Great" on Iraqi flag in January 1991, or as the aforementioned reforms, demonstrates,³⁹⁹ and its use changed. Given the work previously done by the Regime to infiltrate and repress the Iraqi religious environment, in the 1990s, the Regime

³⁹⁷ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 370. al-Sadr (2013). *Mawā'it wa Liqā'āt Ayah Allah al-'Uzmā al-Sayyid al-Šahīd Muḥammad al-Šadr*, pp. 31, 32. Sadr himself, when talking in the Hannaneh interview about the succession of Khu'i and the beginning of his marja'iyya, does not even mention Sistani, but just Sibzawari.

³⁹⁸ Dawisha (2009). *Iraq. A Political History from Independence to Occupation*, pp. 237, 238.

³⁹⁹ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, p. 103

felt it had few opponents in this field and could more openly use religion without the fear of being contradicted by recognized Religious leaders, as most of them were either assassinated or forced into submission.⁴⁰⁰ Helfont states that in the previous decades, the Regime had penetrated the Iraqi religious landscape *by having the right people, institutions, and bureaucracy in place*,⁴⁰¹ a strategy of which having a friendly, or at least a controllable, marja' in Najaf was a part.

In this environment of Ba'athist trust in their capacity to use religion, the "Faith Campaign" was aimed at portraying the Regime as more aligned with Islamic values than how it was perceived to be before. At the same time, this campaign, with the reforms we briefly mentioned, also had the objective of spreading the Ba'athist version of Islam in Iraqi society. Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, Saddam's deputy, declared that religious scholars should denounce *condemnable phenomena in society*, such as theft and bribery, but also other non-Islamic behaviors.⁴⁰² As we shall see in the following two chapters, denouncing "unIslamic behaviors" in society was one of the primary efforts by Sadrists throughout most of the 1990s, pointing to a coincidence of the Regime's interests and the Sadrists' actions.

Dawisha also connects these reforms with the resurgence of tribal values in Iraqi society, a change spearheaded by Saddam himself and that deeply impacted Iraqi society in the 1990s, as we will see in the following chapters.⁴⁰³

These efforts came in an attempt to use Islam to gain popularity when Saddam Hussein probably had sensed the classical dominant Ba'athist Pan-Arabist rhetoric was not in line with the times. Since the Arab defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War with Israel, Pan-Arabist ideas had been slowly declining, to see instead the rise of Islamic Revivalism, greatly strengthened by the victory of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, as we have noticed in the introduction.⁴⁰⁴ Abdul Jabbar noticed that the international context was also pushing in this direction; he stated that Iraq, with the fall of the Soviet Union, had to look for another political model, and thus, it was *the right time to shift to an Islamist model*.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 110.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p. 132.

⁴⁰² Ibid., p. 132.

⁴⁰³ Dawisha (2009). *Iraq. A Political History from Independence to Occupation*, p. 238

⁴⁰⁴ Campanini, Massimo (2006). *Storia del Medio Oriente Contemporaneo*. Bologna: Il Mulino, pp. 156, 168.

⁴⁰⁵ Abdul Jabar, (2004). *The War Generation in Iraq*, pp. 132, 133.

1.2.7 The Rise of the Islamist Generation of the 1990s.

It is in the environment created by the repression of the 1991 Intifada and the start of the Regime's "Faith Campaign" that the 1990s generation of Islamist activists would start to act.

In retracing the different generations of the Islamist movement in Iraq, the Iraqi historian Adil Raouf defines the 1990s generation as the "Third Generation." We have seen how he describes the 1960s and 1970s as the first generation and the 1980s as the second. This second group retired into the study of religion as a consequence of the long years of war with Iran and the Regime's repression. Such group was also the leading actor in the '91 Uprising. Many belonging to this second group left Iraq after the crushing of the Uprising of 1991.⁴⁰⁶ Those who remained in Iraq and continued fighting represent the third generation, elaborating a new and more careful approach to fighting the Regime as they learned from the mistakes of previous Islamist generations.⁴⁰⁷ Muhammad al-Sadr, the future leader of the Sadrist Movement, participated more or less actively in all three generations. As we shall see in the next section retracing Sadr's life, he was close to the Hizb al-Da'wa environment in the early 1960s, even though he was never a member; he spent the 1980s under house arrest, studying and writing many of his well-known works and took part in the 1991 intifada as we have seen.⁴⁰⁸ Finally, he ideally incarnated the example of somebody who, after the crushing of the 1991 intifada, remained in Iraq and kept fighting the Iraqi Regime with a more careful and pragmatic approach,⁴⁰⁹ perfectly described by what Blaydes has defined as a *quietist stratagem* and al-Simri's description of Sadr's careful political choices.⁴¹⁰

This caution was necessary as, as Helfont states, the Regime in the 1990s had come to have an extensive presence in the Iraqi religious environment, controlling mosques, creating Regime-sponsored alternative religious institutions, and increasing the number of loyal religious men.⁴¹¹ The control was not total, but after two decades of repression and

⁴⁰⁶ Mauriello (2011). *Descendants of the Family of the Prophet in Contemporary History*, p. 109.

⁴⁰⁷ Ra'uf, 'Ādil (2005). *al-'Amal al-Islāmiyyah fī al-'Irāq bayn al-Marja'iyyah wa al-hawzah. Qirā'ah naqdīyyah la-masīrah nasf qarn (1950 – 2000)* (The Islamic Action between the Marja'iyyah and the Hawza. A Critical Reading of Half a Century (1950 – 2000). Al-Markaz al-'Irāqī lal-'ilām wa al-dirāsāt, pp. 436, 439. Ra'uf (1999). *Muhammad Muhammad Sādiq al-Ṣadr*, pp. 88, 89.

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with Sheikh R. M., Najaf (12/06/2024).

⁴⁰⁹ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 368.

⁴¹⁰ Blaydes (2018). *State of Repression*. al-Simrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marja'iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, pp. 33, 34.

⁴¹¹ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, pp. 113, 131, 132.

implementing policies aiming at infiltrating the religious environment, the Regime's presence was powerful.⁴¹²

Thus, the carefulness adopted by Raouf's third generation of Islamists is understandable, considering the lessons learned from previous repressions and the Regime's infiltration and control of the religious environment. Raouf's theory, contextualized into the historical reconstruction of the development of the Iraqi Shi'a Islamist movement and its relationship with the Ba'ath Regime, helps us better understand and put Sadr's behavior in the 1990s into perspective. Raouf's theory also helps us see the continuities between the previous expressions of the Shi'a Islamist movement in Iraq and the Sadrist movement in the 1990s, putting thus its development in this broader historical context. Al-Simri also does something similar by reconnecting Sadr's movement with the revolutionary moments in Iraqi history, such as the 1920 Great Revolution or the 1991 Intifada. Simri states that these two, along with the Sadrist emergence during the 1990s, are the highest moments in the history of revolutions in contemporary Iraqi history.⁴¹³

As we already stated, during the 1990s, if the Iraqi state grew weaker, the Ba'ath Party itself did not. In the context of the religious environment, this meant that it retained control over many institutions and mosques and was not in an uncontrolled retreat, as Helfont points out.⁴¹⁴ Thus, if mosques were taken under the control of religious leaders not affiliated with the Regime, this probably happened with the Regime's consent, or at least its knowledge. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Regime appeared to have established itself in the Iraqi religious environment. At that point, it started focusing on keeping other actors out, potentially those critical of the Regime, especially in the religious field. This happened especially with Wahhabi elements throughout the 1990s.⁴¹⁵

1.2.8 The Sadr Family.

The most prominent member of the 1990s Islamist generation was probably Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr. Sadr perfectly represents the three generations of Islamists in Iraq described by Raouf, having lived, studied, and been close to many of the

⁴¹² Ibid., p. 131

⁴¹³ al-Simri (2019) *Dawr al-Marğa'iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, pp. 48, 57. Al-Simri invests the Sadrist phenomenon of the same importance as the 1920 Revolution, seen as a founding moment for the Iraqi nation, and the 1991 Intifada, another central moment for the Islamist movement in Iraq.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., p. 133.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 116, 177.

Islamist milieus in Iraq from the late 1950s to the end of the 1990s, effectively living through half a century of Iraqi history.

Al-Sayyid al-Šahīd Muḥammad Muḥammad Šādiq al-Šadr (Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr), named after his father Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr (1906-1986) ([see pictures 7, 8, 14](#)), was born on the 23rd of March 1943 (the 17th of the month of Rabī' al-Awwal 1362 h.) in Nağaf (Najaf).⁴¹⁶ He was the heir of the prominent clerical family of āl Sadr.⁴¹⁷ The family claims a lineage from the seventh Imam of the line of the twelve Imams of the Twelver Shi'a, Mūsà al-Kāẓim (Musa al-Kadhim), buried in the town of Kadhimiyya, along with the ninth Imam, Muhammad al-Ğawād (al-Jawad). This family traces its history back to the first Imam (Ali Ibn Abi Talib) and thus to the prophet Muhammad himself.⁴¹⁸ Therefore, family members use the title of *sayyid* (sing. of *sādah*), descendants of the prophet's family, and wear the black turban identifying the sayyids in the Shi'a community. Muhammad al-Sadr also received the title of Šahīd (martyr) after his death, recognizing him as a martyr who sacrificed himself in a political and religious struggle. The Sadr family traces its name back to Sadr al-Dīn Muhammad bin Šāliḥ Šarīf al-Dīn (Sadr al-Din Muhammad bin Salih Sharif al-Din) (1779-1848), a member of the Lebanese Sharif al-Din family, part of the Nūr al-Din (Nur al-Din) family, linking its descendants to the seventh Imam, as we have explained before.⁴¹⁹ This lineage sets the Sadr family within the Mūsawī (Mussawi) sayyid, the sayyid descending from Musa al-Kadhim.

The Sadr family originated from the region of Ġabal 'Āmil (Jabal 'Amil) in Southern Lebanon, specifically from the district of Šūr (Tyre) and the village of Šuḥūr, where they settled after moving from the town of Jubā', which was a famous center of learning around the figure of al-Šayh Zayn al-Din ibn 'Ali al-'Amili al-Ğuba'i (911/1506-966/1558), better known as al-Šahid al-Tani.⁴²⁰

The family moved first to Iran and later to Iraq when Sadr al-Din Muhammad bin

⁴¹⁶ al-Šadr (2013). *Mawā'it wa Liqā'āt Ayah Allah al-'Uẓmā al-Sayyid al-Šahīd Muḥammad al-Šadr*, p. 10.

⁴¹⁷ The day of the birth of Muhammad al-Sadr is the same as the birth of the prophet Muhammad, according to the Shi'a tradition, a coincidence that has not gone unnoticed by the followers of Muhammad al-Sadr. al-Asadī (2017). *al-Šadr al-Ṭānī*, p. 39. Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Taḥaṣṣīṣah (2010). *Muqaddimah lal-Āḍwā' 'alā ṭawrah al-Ḥussein*. In al-Šadr. *Āḍwā' 'alā ṭawrah al-Ḥussein*. pp. 10-11. Mauriello, p. 81. In his study on the Alid families of Najaf and their biographies, Mauriello points out how the "marvelous birth" is a recurring theme in the biographies/hagiographies of Shi'is Sayyids.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., p. 10. al-Jibouri (2020). *Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr*, p. 140. al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Šādiq al-Šadr*, p. 435. Cockburn (2008), *Muqtada al-Sadr*, p. 29.

⁴¹⁹ Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Taḥaṣṣīṣah (2010). *Muqaddimah lal-Āḍwā' 'alā ṭawrah al-Ḥussein*. In al-Šadr. *Āḍwā' 'alā ṭawrah al-Ḥussein*. p. 10. al-Asadī (2017). *al-Šadr al-Ṭānī*, p. 39.

⁴²⁰ Mauriello (2011). *Descendants of the Family of the Prophet in Contemporary History*, p. 59.

Saleh (also known as Sadr al-Din Mussawi 'Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, to highlight his origins from Jabal 'Amil and his long residence in Isfahan), moved to Isfahan and then to Nağaf (Najaf) to study. He was buried in 1848 in the Iraqi city, and the family remained in Iraq, moving between Samārā' (Samarra), Kadhimiyya, and Karbala.⁴²¹ A branch of the family, led by Sadr al-Din Sadr (1882-1954), returned to Iran. From this branch was born one of the most prominent scholars of the Sadr family of the second half of the 20th century, Musa al-Sadr (1929-1978), founder of the Amal Movement in Lebanon.⁴²² Another prominent scholar of the Sadr family of the same period was Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (1935-1980), one of the founders of the al-Da'wah party in Iraq and second-degree cousin of Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr.⁴²³

The Sadr family has an intensely political character, both in Iraq, Lebanon, and Iran, highlighting the strong transnational character of the family.⁴²⁴ In his work on the Alid families of Najaf, Mauriello points out how many members of the Sadr family had central roles in Iraqi politics and were known for this since the beginning of the 20th century. He reports that the orientalist Gertrude Bell, in 1920, mentions the Sadr family as one of the most important Shi'a families in Kadhimiyya and how they were staunchly anti-British and pan-Islamist.⁴²⁵ Mauriello states that *The biographical record provided for the al-Sadr family tells us the story of an uninterrupted bid for power and a central and active role into social and political history*.⁴²⁶ This observation is an essential point in the light of which we shall understand Sadr's actions and choices in the 1990s. Already at the end of the 19th century, we find mentions of members of the Sadr family involved in politics: Ismā'īl al-Sadr (1842 – 1920) was among those, in 1891, who pushed for the boycott of the tobacco concession given by the Iranian Shah to British companies. Mahdī al-Sadr (1878 – 1940) participated in the 1920 revolt against the British in Iraq, known as the Great Iraqi Revolution. Muhammad al-Sadr (1883 – 1956) also participated in the 1920 Revolt and was one of its prominent leaders. He was also president of the Iraqi Senate for an extended period and strongly influenced Prince Abd Allah, who ruled from 1939 to 1953. He also held the position of Prime Minister of Iraq in 1948. We have already mentioned Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr more

⁴²¹ Mallat (1993). *The renewal of the Islamic Law*, p. 8. Ya' cūbī (2007). *al-Šahīd al-Šadr al-Ṭānī*, p. 13.

⁴²² Zayn al-'Ābidin, Muhammad Surūr (2011). *Al-Ši'ah fī Lubnān*, Mu'assasah Šaiḥ Muhammad Surūr Zayn al-'Ābidin, p. 101. (<https://tinyurl.com/5n8kr6xy>). For more information on Musa al-Sadr, see Ajami, Fouad (1987). *The Vanished Imam: Musa al-Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

⁴²³ Mallat (1993). *The renewal of the Islamic Law*, p. 8.

⁴²⁴ Mauriello (2011). *Descendants of the Family of the Prophet in Contemporary History*, pp. 58, 59, 60.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., p. 59.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., p. 60

than once and his political activism. Musa al-Sadr, from the Iranian branch of the family, was also an important political and religious figure in Lebanon during the 1960s and 1970s.⁴²⁷ Thus, it seems only natural to add the name of Muhammad al-Sadr to this list.

1.2.8.1 Muhammad al-Sadr's Education and Formative Years.

Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr grew up in the house of his maternal grandfather, the Great Ayatollah Šaiḥ Muhammad Riḍā' al-Yāssīn (1880 – 1951). Thus, he matured in an environment saturated with religious scholars and hawza students. Many of his biographers insist on how this upbringing was central in forming his pious character, tolerance, interest in mystics, and deep knowledge of religion ([see pictures 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 13, 15](#)).⁴²⁸ He is described, quoting a Quranic verse (14:24) in the biographical note in the introduction to *The Lights of Hussain's Revolution*, as *a good tree whose root is firm and whose branches are in the sky*.⁴²⁹

Coming from such a prominent and ancient clerical family, Muhammad al-Sadr joined the hawza at a very young age, beginning his studies in the seminar when he was only eleven years old in 1954.⁴³⁰ Before joining the seminar, he began his grammar and religious sciences studies at his father's hands. He then continued with notorious teachers such as Sayyid Ṭālib al-Rifā'ī (1931 –) – later a founding member of the Hizb al-Da'wa – or Muhammad Ṭāqī al-Ḥakīm (1923 – 2002).⁴³¹ At fourteen, in 1957, Sadr was admitted to the College of Jurisprudence (*Kulliyah al-Fiqh*), where he studied religious sciences, such as Usūl al-Fiqh (principles of Islamic Jurisprudence), philosophy, Arabic grammar, English language, history, sociology, and psychology ([see pictures 11, 12](#)).⁴³² One of the teachers of the College was Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, his cousin and another founder of al-Da'wa, as we have

⁴²⁷ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴²⁸ Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Taḥaṣṣīṣah (2010). *Muqaddimah lal-Āḍwā' 'alā tawrah al-Ḥusseīn*, p. 11. al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Šādiq al-Šadr*, pp. 435-436.

⁴²⁹ Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Taḥaṣṣīṣah (2010). *Muqaddimah lal-Āḍwā' 'alā tawrah al-Ḥusseīn*, p. 11. Qur'an. Surah Ibrahim (14), Ayat 24. The entire verse recites *Have you not seen how God struck an example of a good word like a good tree whose root is firm, and its branch is in the sky?*. The good tree symbolizes the faith of the believer, which aims at the sky. All the quotes from the Qur'an are from the English translation available on the website: <https://www.al-islam.org/quran>.

⁴³⁰ Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Taḥaṣṣīṣah (2010). *Muqaddimah lal-Āḍwā' 'alā tawrah al-Ḥusseīn*, p. 11. To explore the Hawza educational system see Mervin, Sabrina (1995). *La quête du savoir à Naḡaf. Les études religieuses chez les chi'ites imāmītes de la fin du XIXe siècle à 1960*. Studia Islamica, No. 81, pp. 165 – 185.

⁴³¹ Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Taḥaṣṣīṣah (2010). *Muqaddimah lal-Āḍwā' 'alā tawrah al-Ḥusseīn*, pp. 11, 12.

⁴³² Ibid., pp. 11, 12. Mauriello (2011). *Descendants of the Family of the Prophet in Contemporary History*, p. 93.

seen.⁴³³ He then moved up to the al-Suṭūḥ al-ʿAlīyya (the Upper Levels) of education in the hawza. Finally, at twenty-two, he reached the last level of hawza education, the Baḥaṭ al-Ḥariḡī (the Final Dissertation). Sadr studied under the great ayatollahs of his time, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Abū al-Qāsim al-Khuʿī (1899 - 1992), Ruhollah Khomeini (1902 - 1989), and Muḥsin al-Hakim (1889 - 1970).⁴³⁴ At thirty-three, in 1977, he reached the title of muḡtahid (mujtahid) as he was awarded the *Ijtihad*, the ability to interpret with one's rational deduction the sources of Islam (the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the prophet). He was awarded *Ijtihad* by Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, presenting research on the work *al-Muḥtaṣar al-Nāfiʿ* (The Useful Manual) of Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī (1205-1277), an influential Medieval Shi'a jurist.⁴³⁵

Undoubtedly, this impressive scholarly pedigree played a significant role in building Sadr's standing as an outstanding scholar. It also significantly contributed to his claim to authority in the hawza and his gaining followers during the 1990s.⁴³⁶

During this period, Muhammad al-Sadr married the daughter of his uncle Sayyid Muhammad Ġaʿfar al-Sadr, and he had four sons: Muṣṭafā, Muʿamal, Murtaḍā, and Muqtdā.⁴³⁷

After reaching the title of mujtahid, many of Muhammad al-Sadr's biographies insist on his interest in mysticism and his focus on worship, asceticism, and piety.⁴³⁸ In the famous interview of al-Ḥannānah, Sadr himself states that by personal inclination, he prefers solitude, prayer, and meditation to contact with people and large crowds, and he forced

⁴³³ Ibid., p. 93.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., pp. 11 – 14. al-Jibouri (2020). *Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr*, p. 140. al-Ṭāʿī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Sadr*, p. 435. al-Ṣadr (2013). *Mawāʿiṭ wa Liqāʾāt Ayah Allah al-ʿUzmā al-Sayyid al-Ṣahīd Muḥammad al-Ṣadr*, pp. 16, 17.

⁴³⁵ Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Taḥaṣṣīṣah (2010). *Muqaddimah lal-Āḍwā ʿalā tawrah al-Ḥusseīn*, p. 13. al-Ṣadr (2013). *Mawāʿiṭ wa Liqāʾāt Ayah Allah al-ʿUzmā al-Sayyid al-Ṣahīd Muḥammad al-Ṣadr*, pp. 18, 19.

⁴³⁶ Mauriello (2011). *Descendants of the Family of the Prophet in Contemporary History*, pp. 84, 85. Mauriello also finds that studying with masters of his age is a recurring theme in the biographies of Shi'i Sayyids. He exemplifies the phenomenon as: "He studies with the best masters of his age, with whom he deepens the vast knowledge acquired as a child with his father or, as an alternative, with his bigger brother or the uncle". Mauriello also highlights how Sadr is the object of another of these recurring themes; he is a scholar who masters many disciplines simultaneously.

⁴³⁷ al-Jibouri (2020). *Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr*, pp. 140, 141. Mauriello (2011). *Descendants of the Family of the Prophet in Contemporary History*, pp. 65, 125. Also, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr had married the daughter of Sayyid Muhammad Ġaʿfar al-Sadr, al-Sayyida Fatima bint Sadr al-Din al-Sadr, linking the two cousins by marriage to two sisters, in line with the endogamic marriage tradition of families of Sayyids, as pointed out by Mauriello, p. 123. Later on, in 1994, Muqtda married Asma', one of the four daughters of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, strengthening the family ties between the two branches of the Sadr family.

⁴³⁸ Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Taḥaṣṣīṣah (2010). *Muqaddimah lal-Āḍwā ʿalā tawrah al-Ḥusseīn*, p. 13

himself to have a public role only as the interests of Islam required it.⁴³⁹ Thus, in this period, he spent time teaching in the hawza at the highest level and writing his works without making them public. Al-Ta'i states that before 1970, Sadr had already written the first part of his Encyclopedia of the Mahdi and that later, in the following decades, he had completed five other volumes. However, of these six volumes, only four would be published.⁴⁴⁰

Nevertheless, Sadr was arrested in the early seventies, probably due to his political activities connected to milieus close to the Hizb al-Da'wa.⁴⁴¹ He was never a party member, something he cared to specify in an interview.⁴⁴² Still, in the early years of its foundation (1959), he published several articles in the magazine *al-Adwa al-Islamiyyah*,⁴⁴³ published by the group *Jama'a al-'ulama* formed by many of the scholars that would be involved in the Hizb al-Da'wa (See document n. 4, 5). Worth mentioning to understand Sadr's interests and some possible inspirations for its future choices in the 1990s, he published a lengthy article on Machiavelli's "The Prince," highlighting both his broad culture and his interest in political strategy.⁴⁴⁴ In the article, Sadr initially rejects Machiavelli's theory, stating that a good goal can not be reached through corrupted means; however, then drawing on the Islamic idea of permitting something forbidden for the benefit (*maṣlaḥah*) of Islam or the defense of it, he theorizes that in some instances forbidden means are permissible to reach a greater good.

This period of closeness with many of the founding members of the Hizb al-Da'wa and members of the Jama'a al-'ulama was probably paramount in Sadr's political education, along with the experiences he lived through in the 1980s and early 1990s. He lived through the repression of al-Da'wa, the assassination of his cousin and teacher, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, the Regime's infiltration of the religious environment during the 1980s, and the consequences of the war with Iran and Kuwait. Nevertheless, it is also important to highlight

⁴³⁹ al-Ṣadr (2013). *Mawā'it wa Liqā'āt Ayah Allah al-'Uẓmā al-Sayyid al-Ṣahīd Muḥammad al-Ṣadr*, pp. 11 – 13.

⁴⁴⁰ al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, pp. 436, 437.

⁴⁴¹ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 331.

⁴⁴² al-Ṣadr (2013). *Mawā'it wa Liqā'āt Ayah Allah al-'Uẓmā al-Sayyid al-Ṣahīd Muḥammad al-Ṣadr*, p. 24.

⁴⁴³ Al-Adwa al-Islamiyyah, year 1, n. 23, 24 (16 May 1961). Al-Adwa al-Islamiyyah, year 5, n. 7, 8, 9, 10 (1975). Al-Adwa al-Islamiyyah year 6, n. 1 (1975).

⁴⁴⁴ al-Ṣadr, Muḥammad (1963). Bayn al-Mikyāfiliyyah wa al-Islām. (Between Machiavelism and Islam). Al-Adwa al-Islamiyyah, year 6, n. 2 (February 1966). In al-Ṣadr, Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq (2013). *Risā'il wa Maqālāt. Iṣarāqāt Fikriyyah*. (Letters and Articles. Intellectual Insights). Vol 2. Naḡaf: Mu'assasah al-Muntaẓar la-'Ihyā' Turāt Āl al-Ṣadr, pp. 157 – 169. The article was initially composed in 1963, according to the date on the manuscript, as reported in the book here quoted. It was then published in the magazine al-Adwa in February 1966 and then collected in the aforementioned volume. Al-Hidāl, Amḡad Hāmid (2012). *Al-Fikr al-Siyāsī 'ind al-Ṣahīd Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr* (The Political Thought of the Martyr Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr). Bayrūt: Mu'assasah al-Balāḡ lal-Ṭabā'ah wa al-Naṣr wa al-Tawzī'.

a break between the environments of Hizb al-Da'wa and Sadr. As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, al-Da'wa was almost entirely crushed by the Regime's repression by 1980, and its presence in Iraq was close to none during the 1980s and 1990s. When Sadr started building its movement in the 1990s, he relied on a completely different network of people and the support of different socio-economic groups than al-Da'wa, as we shall see.⁴⁴⁵

Furthermore, he was banned from teaching in the 80s. He could only give informal lessons in the al-Ra's Mosque, roughly from 1978 to 1990.⁴⁴⁶ This point is relatively obscure, as some authors support that he was banned from teaching from the end of the 70s to the 90s.⁴⁴⁷ At the same time, al-Ta'i affirms that he started again giving lessons in the hawza in 1988. Thus, these events have no precise dates in Sadr's life. Still, we can affirm with some degree of confidence that he was banned from teaching for a period in the 80s. Also, several sources point to the fact that Sadr was under house arrest throughout the 1980s after the assassination of his two cousins, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Amina al-Sadr (Bint al-Hudà).⁴⁴⁸

However, in January 1991, right before the March 1991 Uprising, Sadr was allowed to visit Iran with a multisect delegation (Sunna – Shi'a). He traveled with Sheikh Ahmad al-Bahādilī, Ḥussayn al-Sadr (1951 –), and other scholars to meet the Iranian leadership and calm the tension between Iraq and Iran, probably in the context of the invasion of Kuwait and the Coalition response, where Saddam tried to reconcile with the neighboring country, as we have seen. Sadr was chosen by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to lead the delegation to Iran. According to Sadrist analysis, the Regime wanted to show the Iranian leadership that they had a good relationship with the Iraqi Shi'a, as a reconciliation gesture, by sending a delegation headed by a member of the prestigious Sadr family. Sadr and al-Bahadali even went to al-Khu'i to seek counsel and permission, as the head of the hawza, for the trip. The Grand Ayatollah did not provide a decisive response, and they decided to depart. They both suspected the Regime wanted to use them, confirmed by a meeting with Izzah Ibrahim al-Duri in Baghdad before leaving, where he asked them to reestablish the relationships between the two countries and try to test the waters for Iranian help against the UN sanctions. An intelligence agent escorted them to control them. The delegation was warmly welcomed

⁴⁴⁵ Laval (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*, p. 440.

⁴⁴⁶ al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 437. al-Jibouri (2020). *Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 140.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 140.

⁴⁴⁸ Interview with Sheikh R. M., Najaf (12/06/2024). Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 369. al-Ṣadr (2013). *Mawā'iz wa Liqā'āt Ayah Allah al-'Uẓmā al-Sayyid al-Ṣahīd Muḥammad al-Ṣadr*, p. 26.

in Iran, meeting with high officials and touring the country, particularly Qom and Mashhad. The mission's outcome was unclear, but it was probably unsuccessful.⁴⁴⁹

Nevertheless, if for the Regime it was not a successful trip, it was significant for Sadr; he even composed a poem for Ayatollah Ḥāmeneī (1939 –) with the title “Friday Prayer,” in which he defined Khamenei as “Imam of all mankind.” In the poem, he described the Friday prayer he participated in during his visit to Iran at the University of Tehran. This experience clearly struck Sadr, and he describes the prayer in enthusiastic terms, remarking on the thousands of people who attended, the sermon, the presence of Khamenei himself, and his charismatic leadership. This prayer might have been an inspiring sight for Sadr for what he envisioned to do in Iraq himself a few years later.⁴⁵⁰

This trip is particularly interesting as it shows that Sadr was already in 1991 in the Regime's officials' minds as a figure who could be used and exploited for their gains. Unfortunately, we have no other evidence that these contacts continued, as we shall see in the rest of this research.

As we have seen in previous sections of this chapter, Sadr emerged from this period of isolation during March 1991 in the *Intifada Shaba'niyya*, along with many of his generation, as pointed out by Raouf. During these events, he tried to play a role in the revolt and assert his leadership by publishing the aforementioned declaration supporting what he defined as *the Islamic Revolution in Iraq*,⁴⁵¹ exploiting the perception that other leaders were too moderate. From that moment on, especially seeing an opportunity in the void of power after the passing of Aytollah al-Khu'i, after his release from the Regime around the end of March 1991, Sadr did not go back into a secluded life of study, prayer, and meditation but started building a network and a movement that later would be known as *Tayyar al-Sadri*, following his family tradition, in his bid for power, both in Iraq and the hawza.

⁴⁴⁹ Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024).

⁴⁵⁰ Al-Sadr, Muhammad (2011). *Mağmū'ah Aš'ār al-Ḥayāh*. (Collection of Life's Poem) Nağaf: Haya'ah Turāt al-Šahīd al-Sa'īd al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Šadr, p. 293.

⁴⁵¹ al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Šādiq al-Šadr*, p. 439.

1.3 First Part Conclusions.

In the first part of the dissertation, we analyzed the Regime's policies toward religious opposition and its interest in infiltrating and controlling the religious environment. We saw that the Regime was remarkably successful in crushing religious opposition, leaving by the 1980s decade almost no organized opposition force inside Iraq, as testified by the spontaneity and lack of coordination of the 1991 revolt in the South.

The Ba'ath was comparatively slightly less successful in infiltrating the religious environment, especially among the Shi'a, even though it managed to eliminate or silence all important religious leaders and, thus, it felt comfortable in using religious rhetoric without fear of contradiction, as shown by Helfont. Furthermore, we have seen how the Regime managed to map out mosques and religious figures, having a clear idea and knowledge of the Iraqi religious environment by the 1990s.

We also examined the consequences of the Iran-Iraq War on the Iraqi population and how the war mobilization helped the Regime tighten its grip on Iraqi society. Furthermore, we could point out how the Shi'a population and the Southern regions of Iraq had to shoulder the heavier losses of the war. The War with Iran also depleted Iraq's economy, straining the State's capability to maintain its welfare system.

The 1990 invasion of Kuwait, the international response with the UN sanctions, and the Coalition response further added grievances to the already long list lamented by the Iraqi people, leading to the 1991 Intifada. Again, the regions of Southern Iraq, inhabited mainly by Shi'as, were those who paid the higher price for the war with Kuwait and the US-led coalition campaign, for the repression of the Intifada, and, ultimately, as shown by Blaydes, also for the UN sanctions. In particular, the repression of the 1991 intifada, aimed at the population of South Iraq in general for lack of precise intelligence, contributed to solidifying an already growing sentiment among the Iraqi Shi'as of being targeted by the Regime and, thus, feeding a building sectarian feeling.

Moreover, we have highlighted how the death of al-Khu'i opened a struggle for power and control of the hawza among the Shi'i scholars and the Regime. Shortly after this event, the "Faith Campaign" was launched to step up its use of religious rhetoric and symbolism. All these events shaped the 1990s generation of Islamists, of whom Sadr was a chief member.

Finally, it is thus in this context of lack of any organized resistance to the Regime among the Shi'a Islamists in Iraq, the Regime's infiltration of the religious environment, and the growing grievances by the Shi'a community that, as a reaction to being persecuted and hit on a group level, reacted by solidifying along the sectarian lines, economic scarcity under UN sanctions, void of power in the hawza, Regime's interest in supporting a religious discourse in Iraqi society and, in this sense, pushing for an Arab marja' in the hawza, that Sadr started forming its movement. He took advantage of the lack of any other organized movement among the Shi'a in Iraq and the void of power left by the death of al-Khu'i; he presented himself as the answer to the grievances of the Shi'a community against the Regime, impersonating the leader that this growingly solid community needed to fight back the defeats we listed.⁴⁵² Sadr seized the potential for mobilization during this period and of a particular section of the Iraqi population.⁴⁵³ Still, at the same time, he also took advantage of the Regime's willingness to support an Arab marja' that would spread religiosity in Iraqi society and support, from a religious point of view, the Regime's anti-American and anti-Israeli rhetoric.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵² Machlis (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State," p. 6. Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*. Al-Simri states that *There were new chants that the Iraqi street did not hear, such as "Yes, yes to Islam," "Yes, yes to the doctrine," and "Yes, yes to Friday," in contrast to the slogans "No Shiites after today," which the authority raised after the uprising, and another slogan that stated "No... No. For falsehood, no.. no.. for America, no.. no.. for Israel, no.. no.. for colonialism. No.. no.. for arrogance. No, no, Satan."* Chants and slogans were used by the Sadrists. In this way, he highlights how Sadr tried to oppose new code words for the Shi'a community, to oppose those of their defeats. al-Simrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marğa' iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 93.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 379

2. Second Part. The Construction and Spread of Sadrism in Iraqi Society: 1992 – 1996.

This section will explore the most obscure part of the history of the Sadrist Trend during the 1990s, its formative period from 1992-1993 to 1996. Usually, after describing Sadr's role in the '91 Intifada, Sadr's biographies and works on the Sadrist movement leap to the period when he established the Friday congregational prayer in 1998 and the period of his assassination in 1999, the moment of maximum visibility of the Sadrists in the 1990s.⁴⁵⁵

Nevertheless, understanding how it became possible to implement the prayers, and with such large numbers of attendance since the beginning, as confirmed by Regime's sources, Sadrists and non-Sadrists interviewees, is of central importance to reconstructing the movement's history. Furthermore, it is essential to reconstruct what happened in the years before the prayers, understand why and how Sadr started mobilizing after 1991, and understand the consequences of this decision. This section of Sadrist history is the most obscure also as sources are very scarce, and thus, the chapter will be based primarily on interviews with Sadrists active in the movement during the 1990s. In this chapter, we will explore why Sadr decided to open his office as a marja' between the end of 1992 and the beginning of 1993, how his popularity grew, and which mechanisms he used. We will then explore how Sadr recruited new students in the hawza, formed them to be his agents (*wukala'*), and structured the enlarging movement. Sadr's works will also be studied and analyzed, and their contents will be examined, including how Sadr's *wukala'* spread these ideas and their effects on Iraqi society. We will also try to trace the social profile of Sadrist followers while looking at the dynamics of tribalization in Iraqi society in the 1990s and how this impacted Sadrism. Finally, we will look at the Iraqi Regime's repression in this period, contextualizing Sadr's rise with the Regime's response.

⁴⁵⁵ Only al-Simri gives some general indications of what Sadr did in the years between 1991 and 1997: *After Sadr gained the status of marja'ah and started exerting his influence on the hawza, he built his approach to political authority [the Iraqi Regime] according to his needs. Then, he started creating a relationship with the masses, as they were the ones he was worrying about.* al-Simri (2019) *Dawr al-Marğa'iyah al-Fā'ilah*, p 84. Al-Ta'i also mentions the preliminary effort of preparing and establishing the network of representatives, distributing printed material to spread Sadr's ideas, and, as a culmination of these efforts, establishing the Friday prayer. This could be a hint about Sadr's activities and his movement during the years between the 1991 uprising and the establishment of the Friday prayer in 1998. al-Ṭā'i (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, pp. 446, 447.

2.1 First Chapter: Taking Control of the Hawza and Building the Sadrist Network.

2.1.1 The Opening of Sadr's Office and the Spread of Sadr's Marja'iyya.

It is challenging to set a precise date concerning the beginning of the Sadrist Movement; symbolically, as we explained in the first chapter, we can set it during the 1991 Intifada, which, beyond Sadr's impact, exemplifies his renewed interest and engagement in politics and the beginning of the process that will result in the construction of the Sadrist movement.⁴⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it was in the period following the Uprising, between 1992 and 1993, that Sadr's name started circulating, associated with his claim to the marja'iyya.⁴⁵⁷ Most sources agree that Sadr opened his office as a marja' in late 1992 after the death of al-Khu'i.⁴⁵⁸ As we highlighted at the end of the previous chapter, Khu'i's death was a significant turning point for Sadr's engagement with politics, opening a void of power that Sadr tried to fill. Sadr highlights that he would have preferred not to claim the marja'iyya but that it was forced to do it since it was a required action to preserve religion and, thus, a religious duty.⁴⁵⁹ This event happened almost simultaneously with the Regime's "Faith Campaign" start and its interest in filling Khoei's position with an Arab marja'.

Thus, sometime after August 1992, Sadr opened his marja's office in Najaf, next to Imam Ali Shrine, in a very central position, just a few meters away from the sanctuary, a privilege that not even Ayatollah Sistani could boast.

In the year following the death of Khu'i and the quick succession of the other two senior Ayatollahs, Golpaygani and Sibzawari, groups of primarily young Iraqis started to converge on Najaf from Baghdad, or central and southern Iraq to visit the different senior

⁴⁵⁶ al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*. al-Simrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marja' iyyah al-Fā'ilah*.

⁴⁵⁷ Interview with Sayyid M. Najaf (29/05/2024). He stated that Sadr's movement started in 1992, after al-Khoei's death, but that he heard Sadr as a marja' for the first time in 1995.

⁴⁵⁸ Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (29/11/2023). Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024). Interview with S., Najaf (29/05/2024).

⁴⁵⁹ al-Ṣadr (2013). *Mawā'it wa Liqā'āt Ayah Allah al-'Uẓmā al-Sayyid al-Ṣāhīd Muḥammad al-Ṣadr*, pp. 31, 32, 68, 69.

ayatollahs and chose which one to follow after the passing of al-Khu'i, who was the reference for most of the Iraqi and Iranian Shi'a.⁴⁶⁰ Some of them regularly went to Najaf to visit the Shrine of Imam Ali, and, given the death of most senior Ayatollah, they also took the opportunity to visit some other important religious men and try to find a new spiritual and religious guide, a new marja'.⁴⁶¹ They asked questions to the different marja' and tried to find the one they thought most capable and worthy of their devotion.

Many of these young Iraqis found the answer to their search in Muhammad al-Sadr.

The reasons for the spread of the popularity of Sadr are various. Indeed, when visiting the different marja' in Najaf, many of them were struck by the fact that Sadr carried the name of such an essential religious family and that this name brought back never-forgotten memories of his famous cousin, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, his opposition to the Regime and his martyrdom in 1980. Thus, this family connection had a central role in the growth of his popularity and was why many young Iraqis chose him as a marja'.⁴⁶² Others were convinced by Sadr's knowledgeable answers to their religious questions or by his charismatic and pious presence, particulars almost always present in Sadr's description and perfectly in line with the biography of a charismatic Shi'a leader and a sayyid, as highlighted by Mauriello. These are, most likely, *a posteriori* reconstructions of how things went; nevertheless, they tell us about Sadr's followers' vision of their leaders. Another point often raised is Sadr's ability to communicate simply and directly with everybody, being knowledgeable and simple at the same time. His communication capacity certainly helped by his being a native Iraq, and he could thus communicate in Iraqi dialect with people coming to see him, a language that sounded much more familiar to Iraqis than the Classical Arabic spoken by most other prominent religious scholars in Najaf that were not of Iraqi origins. This gave Sadr a great advantage with the Iraqi Shi'a.⁴⁶³

One of Sadr's students and agents in the 1990s, Sheikh G., recalls that he chose Sadr as a marja' after visiting Najaf for three days and asking the most experienced hawza students

⁴⁶⁰ Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024). Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). Sadr could not claim the marja'iyya before Khu'i's death since al-Khu'i was unequivocally senior to Sadr in the clerical hierarchy and was Sadr's old professor; thus, also out of respect, Sadr could not claim his place or even be at the same level while he was still alive.

⁴⁶¹ Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024).

⁴⁶² Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024). He says he was unaware of other important religious figures in the Sadr family after Baqir al-Sadr. However, he says he quickly joined Muhammad al-Sadr when he discovered it. Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). Interview with H., Najaf (13/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024).

⁴⁶³ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 372.

whom he should choose as a marja' and visiting many 'ulama. When visiting Sadr, he was struck by his claim to the heritage of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and, thus, his claim to be the most knowledgeable of the scholars of his time.⁴⁶⁴ Impressed by the scholarly pedigree and family connection, G., once back home in Baghdad, sent Sadr 57 questions on religion, Islamic jurisprudence, and similar topics. Sadr quickly answered with precision and wisdom. G. sent another 40 questions concerning European philosophy, problems of Iraqi society, and Iraqi politics. Sadr again answered without delay and without shunning political questions, to which he responded frankly and directly. After these exchanges, G. decided that he needed no further proof. He became a loyal follower of Muhammad al-Sadr, under whom he would become a student in the hawza and one of his *wakil* during the 1990s.⁴⁶⁵ He is not the only one pointing to Sadr's academic production and knowledge of why he became Sadr's follower. Also, Sayyid K. H., another of Sadr's students and agents from the 1990s, states that it was Sadr's extensive production of *fatawa*, books, and articles that led him to Sadr, among the many other scholars that he had visited, he quoted Burujerdi, Hussein Bahr al-Ulum and Sa'id al-Hakim.⁴⁶⁶ After his death, even some followers of al-Khu'i became Sadr's followers, choosing Sadr over what was seen as the heir of their previous marja', Sistani. They did so for Sadr's criticism of the moral corruption of Iraqi society and his intention to reform it by spreading religiosity in it once again.⁴⁶⁷

The movement between Najaf and other Iraqi cities grew during the years 1993 – 1994, with many of Sadr's newly acquired followers visiting him in Najaf and then bringing back news and teachings from Sadr to their communities.⁴⁶⁸ Some of his followers declare that they went in groups to Najaf every Friday to pray in Najaf at the shrine of Imam Ali and listen to Sadr's teachings and would go back to their hometowns.⁴⁶⁹ Sadr's name and claim to the marja'iyya spread rapidly through this word-of-mouth mechanism in central and southern Iraq.⁴⁷⁰ In this way, the number of Sadr's followers started to grow. Hearing about Sadr's claim from people who had visited him in Najaf and talked about him and his

⁴⁶⁴ Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). Sheikh M. recalls that Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr wrote the introduction to Muhammad al-Sadr's work "The Encyclopedia of the Mahdi" in 1977, praising the work and the author. From this basis, many Sadrists claim that Baqir al-Sadr had designated Muhammad al-Sadr as his heir and most knowledgeable in the Hawza.

⁴⁶⁵ Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

⁴⁶⁶ Interview with K. H., Najaf, (04/03/2024).

⁴⁶⁷ Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024). Interview with H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁴⁶⁸ Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

⁴⁶⁹ Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). Interview with A., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

⁴⁷⁰ Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

connection to Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in mosques, husseiniyyas, and houses, more went to see him and joined the ranks of his followers.⁴⁷¹ For the Usuli Twelver Shi'a, all lay believers had to choose a *marja' al-taqlid/al-dini* (a source of religious emulation) to follow in his religious judgments and decisions, so they became the *muqallidīn* (followers) of a specific *marja'*.

From these accounts, we can understand how Sadr started gathering followers, engaging with them, counting on diffusion through personal connections, answering their questions, and relying on his family prestige and a certain level of charisma he probably had.

However, there are other factors to consider in the growth of Sadr's following as a *marja'*. One of Sadr's followers recalls hearing Sadr's name announced on National Television as the new *marja'*.⁴⁷² The town hall of Najaf did not want to give Sadr an office during the 1980s and the years 1990 and 1991. However, after the death of al-Khu'i, the office was assigned, with electricity provided by Imam Ali Shrine and a small amount of money offered by the government. An interviewee also stated that not taking such money would constitute a declaration of hostility toward the Regime and thus to be avoided in that period.⁴⁷³

These events would point to robust backing from the Iraqi state of Sadr's claim to the *marjaiyya* amid the Ba'ath Regime "Faith Campaign" and its push for an Arab *marja'*, as we highlighted in the previous chapter.

Henceforth, this information would push for a more nuanced understanding of the beginning of the spread of Sadr's popularity, not wholly denying the aspects highlighted by Sadr's followers but putting them in the context of institutional support and enablement of Sadr's campaign to spread his *marja'iyya*.

These factors also account for some of the suspicions surrounding Sadr about his relations with the Regime at the beginning of the 1990s, which are not denied even by those who later became ardent followers. One of them, Sheikh R., states that he was Sistani's follower until 1994 after starting his studies in 1991. However, he says he realized there was a defamation campaign against Sadr by other *maraja'* and asked about him to hawza students,

⁴⁷¹ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyya (19/06/2024).

⁴⁷² Interview in Baghdad in June 2024. As specified in the introduction, we preferred not to mention the interviewee's name for safety reasons.

⁴⁷³ Interview in Baghdad in March 2024. For safety reasons, as specified in the introduction, we preferred not to mention the interviewee's name in this case.

who confirmed Sadr's good faith. He thus went to see Sadr and, after discussing religious and political issues with him, decided to become his follower.⁴⁷⁴

This account confirms that there were suspicions that Sadr was benefiting from the Regime's support. At the same time, Sadr was, in a certain way, forced to accept the Regime's help to avoid a confrontation, as a refusal of the Regime's economic support would have been equivalent to a declaration of war, and this help had been accepted previously also by al-Khu'i for the same reasons.⁴⁷⁵ Sadr thus accepted this help strategically to spread his marja'iyya and use these resources as an advantage against his rivals in the hawza.

Interestingly, most of Sadr's followers we interviewed referred to the period between 1992, 1993, and even 1994 as the first time they heard about Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr.⁴⁷⁶ A part from some exceptions of people who came from particularly religious families that were previously involved with Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Hizb al-Da'wa, or Islamist movements in general and thus were also familiar with Muhammad al-Sadr⁴⁷⁷ and another group that joined Sadrism later on during the 1990s and, thus, heard of Sadr in 1997, or 1998, when the Friday prayers started,⁴⁷⁸ the bulk of interviewees say that they first met or heard of Sadr during the 1992 – 1994 period.⁴⁷⁹

The fact that most people say that they first heard of Sadr in 1992-1994 indicates that Sadr's name did not appear as a leading one during the 1991 Intifada outside Najaf. It can also give us some understanding of the formation of Sadr's following. We can divide Sadr's

⁴⁷⁴ Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (03/06/2024),

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

⁴⁷⁷ Interview with Sheikh S., Najaf (03/03/2024). He was Sadr's representative in the 1990s, but he knew him already as he had contacts with Sadr I and had read Muhammad al-Sadr's works. He first met him between 1991 and 1992. Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024). He first heard of Sadr in the 1980s, as his family was in contact with Sadr's family. He became Sadr's representative in the 1990s. Interview with Sayyid K. H., Najaf (04/03/2024). He first heard of Sadr in the 1980s through his writings. Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024). He first met Sadr in 1993, but he knew him from the 1980s, as he came from a family of religious activists. Interview with Hajj Q. Q., Baghdad (24/02/2024). He belongs to a family of religious activists, and his family opened the al-Hikma Mosque in Madina Saddam, which became an important Sadrism center in the area during the 1990s. Thus, he had heard about Sadr already during the 1980s, and he was the only interviewee present during a sermon given by Sadr during the 1991 Intifada. Interview with Sheikh H., Baghdad (03/12/2023). He first heard about Sadr in 1993. Interview with Sheikh Q. (08/06/2024). Sheikh Q. had read Sadr's articles in al-Adwa and his works; thus, he knew about him before the 1990s.

⁴⁷⁸ Interview with Sheikh K. Q., Baghdad (24/02/2024). He heard of Sadr for the first time in 1997. Interview with M. K., Najaf (31/05 – 01/06/2024). M. K. heard about Sadr for the first time in 1998.

⁴⁷⁹ Interview with Sheikh T., Baghdad (24/02/2024); he was Sadr's representative and heard about Sadr for the first time in 1993. Interview with Sayyid H. K., Najaf (03/03/2024). He first heard of Sadr in 1993 and became Sadr's representative. Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad (19/02/2024). He first heard about Sadr in 1993. Interview with A., Baghdad (19/02/2024). He first heard of Sadr in 1993. Interview with S., Najaf (29/05/2024). He first heard about Sadr in 1995 and was a Basra resident then. Interview with Sheikh M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). He heard about Sadr for the first time in 1992; he later became his representative. Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024). He heard about Sadr for the first time in 1992 and became his representative.

supporters into three groups: first one of people who came from particularly religious families and had some involvement with previous Islamist movements and thus knew about Muhammad al-Sadr and his works, such as the *Encyclopedia of the Mahdi* and the like; this group nevertheless started following Sadr as a marja' when he began making his claim to the position, around 1992. The second group of followers comprises those who first heard about Sadr in 1992 – 1994 and became Sadr's followers in this period. Finally, we find a group that started following Sadr after the start of the Friday prayers in 1997, which, as we shall see, attracted large crowds.

This division allows us to start analyzing some of the traits of the composition of Sadr's following. We see that there is a relatively small group of people previously involved with Islamist movements, tracing a line of tenuous line of continuity between Sadrism and previous Islamist mobilizations in Iraq, and represent the people who lived the same experience as Sadr himself, the 1990s third-generation Islamists, following Adil Raouf description used in the previous chapter. The second group was formed by people, primarily young,⁴⁸⁰ who did not come from religious families or were only vaguely religious but not in any politicized way, and at the beginning of the 1990s, they felt attracted by Sadr's message of engagement and reform of society and direct connection with his followers. This phenomenon highlights a renewed interest in religion and a form of religiosity engaged with society at the beginning of the 1990s, marking the shift highlighted in the introduction in the Islamic world and grasped by the Regime's "Faith Campaign." This group emerged from the interviews as the bulk of Sadr's supporters. The third group of followers, those who joined during the Friday prayer period (1997 – 1999), emerges as the smaller from the interviews but would probably be the largest in absolute terms, as that was the moment of Sadr's maximum popularity, with Prayers attendance touching the 30.000 people.

2.1.2 Sadr's Students in the Hawza and the Reopening of Hawza's Schools.

After the proclaiming of his marja'iyya and the opening of his office, Sadr's name started slowly circulating in Iraqi communities through the word-of-mouth mechanism, and

⁴⁸⁰ Interview with Hajj Q., Baghdad (24/02/2024). He stresses that initially, primarily young people joined Sadr, and only during the Prayers, or even after Sadr's death, did older generations start attending Sadrist prayers and similar activities.

more and more people visited his office in Najaf, as we described in the previous section. The spread of the news of his marja'iyya, helped by some institutional push and amid the "Faith Campaign," marked a renewed enthusiasm for religion, and many new students arrived to crowd the empty hawza again. In the 1980s and at the very beginning of the 1990s, the hawza had a historically low number of students due to the Regime's repression and policies, as we have seen in the previous chapter.⁴⁸¹

However, Sadr was able to attract new students to the hawza. Many of those who first heard about Sadr for the first time in 1992 or 1993 decided to enter the hawza and become his students. Sadr reorganized exams to become a student in the hawza. He first sets a written test and then an oral one.⁴⁸² The oral exam occurred in Sadr's office, and the questions focused on religious knowledge. Candidates were also required to present two reference letters from well-known religious men.⁴⁸³ Sadr made the final decision independently from the results of the tests, as he also judged the candidate's morality.⁴⁸⁴ Sheikh G., one of Sadr's students since 1993 and later his agent, reports that he had to pass a test of *fiqh* (Islamic Law) and one of *Ahlāq* (Ethics) before entering hawza and becoming one of Sadr's students.⁴⁸⁵ Sheikh Q. K., also Sadr's student and agent, states that Sadr preferred students with an academic background or some form of religious education as he was interested in sciences and wanted his students to handle subjects such as computer science or English; Sadr wanted students who also knew contemporary society and could act and talk to it, in line with his activists, militant and socially involved approach. Sheikh Q. had a history degree and was well prepared for religious studies. For this reason, he was admitted to the hawza already at the *sutūh* level (the second of three levels in the hawza studies).

Sheikh M., student and agent, studied psychology at the University of Baghdad while studying in hawza.⁴⁸⁶ Sheikh K., also a student and then agent of Sadr, was already studying religious sciences in Baghdad before deciding to move to Najaf to study with Sadr in 1992.⁴⁸⁷ In general, Sadr admitted to the hawza students from different backgrounds, not only

⁴⁸¹ Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024). Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024). Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (03/03/2024). Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024). Interview with H., Najaf (13/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyah (19/06/2024). Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, pp. 83, 84.

⁴⁸² Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024). Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 380. Hasan states that they had two exams, one on religious and one on non-religious topics.

⁴⁸³ Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).

⁴⁸⁴ Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

⁴⁸⁵ Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

⁴⁸⁶ Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024).

⁴⁸⁷ Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

religious studies but also other university studies and different social milieus.⁴⁸⁸ Furthermore, Sadr attracted to the hawza mainly Iraqi students, something perfectly in line with the Regime's idea of "Arabizing" the hawza. Also, other maraja' organized exams to admit students into the hawza, and often, students tried multiple exams of different maraja' to increase their possibilities of success.⁴⁸⁹ Nevertheless, it is with Sadr that the number of students applying increased.⁴⁹⁰ This increase was due to several reasons connected with the reasons we highlighted for the spread of Sadr's popularity as a marja'.

Apart from Sadr's charisma and inspiring personality, which, as we previously highlighted, are traits of Sadr's official biography, some material conditions and institutional support enabled the growth of student numbers, just like it happened with the spread of his marja'iyya.

To attract new students to the hawza, Sadr started reopening some of the hawza schools (*madāris*, pl. of *madrasah*).⁴⁹¹ These are to be seen as residential colleges in a university, where students would be housed, fed, and have a space to study, often providing also a library. Sometimes, lessons took place in these schools ([See pictures n. 16, 17, 18](#)). Most of these schools were closed during the 1980s, parallel with the decrease in students due to the Regime's attempt to block international students from entering the country, the Regime's general repression, and a lack of funds to support the schools.⁴⁹²

Sadr, between 1993 and 1996, started reopening many of these schools and took control of them; from 4 schools in 1992, he reopened around 20 schools by 1996.⁴⁹³ Sadr's followers literally reopened the schools, cleaned them, reconnected electricity and water, and made the spaces habitable again.⁴⁹⁴ Sheikh A. S. was one of the people charged by Sadr with opening one of the schools; he did so with the Madrasa al-Qazwīnī, next to Ġāma' al-Hindiyyah and with the Madrasa al-Šīrāzī, in the new neighborhood in Najaf.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁸⁸ 'Abd al-Sattār al-Bahādili, *had exercised the particularly despicable trade of popular singer before entering the circle of his students*. Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*. Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 375. Ali Sheikh Q., another of Sadr's most trusted students, was a boxer before entering the hawza.

⁴⁸⁹ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024).

⁴⁹⁰ Interview with Sheikh T., Baghdad (24/02/2024).

⁴⁹¹ Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024).

⁴⁹² Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza under Siege*, p. 28. Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*, pp. 83, 84.

⁴⁹³ Interview with Sayyid K., Najaf (29/11/2023). Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024). Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 380.

⁴⁹⁴ Interview with Sheikh T., Baghdad (24/02/2024). Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

This process did not always occur smoothly, and other religious families in Najaf that traditionally controlled certain schools protested about Sadr's takeover. For instance, one of the schools contended was the Madrasa al-Bākistāniyyah (Pakistaniyyah), traditionally controlled by the al-Hakim family.⁴⁹⁶

Abbas Kadhim, in his study on the emergence of Sadr's presence in the hawza in the 1990s, highlights how Sadr took control of this school without permission from the government, insisting on the fact that the Ba'ath documents use the term *seized (istahwāḍa 'alayha)*, expressing how Sadr did not have Regime's permission.⁴⁹⁷ In his study on the Sadrist movement, Harith Hasan supports the opposite theory: that the Regime supported Sadr in taking control of these schools.⁴⁹⁸ In our opinion, based on both the Ba'ath archives records and interviews with both Sadrists and non-Sadrists, the Regime's policy toward Sadr was more one of "non-interference" rather than active support, apart from the offering of some financial support, which, as we have seen from the studies of Helfont, Kadhim and interviews, was generally offered to religious scholars in Najaf with the hope of influencing them and it was impossible to refuse.

In the end, Sadr came to control most of the religious schools in Najaf: the Madrasa al-Būruḡirdī, the Madrasa Imām Ṣādiq, the Madrasa al-Qawwām, Fāḍil al-Ṣarbiyānī, al-Uzariyyah, al-Imām Riḍā, al-Lubnāniyyeh, al-Širāzī, Amīr al-Mu'minin, al-Bukhara'i, Imām Bāqir, Qazwīnī, Baḡdādī, Hindiyyah, Mahdiyyah, Aḥūnd al-Kubrā, Aḥūnd al-Wūstā, al-Yazdī, Musa al-Kāẓim, al-Hādī.⁴⁹⁹

Sadr puts some of his closer students in charge of these schools, assigning one of his trusted students to each. Thus, for instance, Sheikh G. became the *mutawalli* (administrator) for the Madrasa Imam Sadiq and, before that, was living in the Madrasa al-Burujerdi (also known as Madrasa al-Hussein).

Alternatively, Sayyid A. initially became the *mutawalli* for the Madrasa al-Qazwini and later for the Madrasa al-Akhund al-Kubra. The *mutawalli* was designed officially by Sadr with a document of *tawalli*, as shown in this example provided by Sayyid A., who was put in charge of the Qazwini school ([See Document n. 6](#)). Another document provided by

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid. Ra'uf, (1999). *Muhammad Muhammad Sādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 358-363. In the end, the Regime ordered the transfer of the school back to the al-Hakim family. Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza under Siege*, p. 44. Sadr gave back the school and called for reconciliation with the rival family. Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 380.

⁴⁹⁷ Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza under Siege*, p. 44. All the documents regarding the seizure of the schools are to be found in the box BRCC 2974_0001.

⁴⁹⁸ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, pp. 379, 380.

⁴⁹⁹ Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

Sheikh G. ([See Document n. 7](#)) shows us an example of communication between the *mutawalli*, Sheikh G., and Sadr, who had put him in charge of the Imam Sadiq School. The document shows the internal communication and daily administration of the aforementioned schools.

Many of Sadr's students we mentioned lived in these schools and received a salary from Sadr.⁵⁰⁰ This salary came from the revenues of religious taxes paid by Sadr's followers to Sadr, the *khums*. This tax, a fifth on certain goods and revenues, is to be paid by followers to their chosen marja'; thus, at the beginning of his marja'iyya, when he was still spreading his name, around 1993, 1994, Sadr did not have so many followers and, consequently, had a small revenue from this tax. Initially, because his *wukala'* network was still developing and he did not have agents to collect this tax, Sadr permitted his followers to distribute part of the *khums* directly to the poor and needy.⁵⁰¹ At the same time, only a part would be sent to him for school and student salaries.⁵⁰² Sheikh M. stated that actually, most of the *khums* was redirected toward schools for electricity, water, food, and the like, and students.⁵⁰³

Sadr could also provide an exemption to hawza students to keep them from having to show up for their military service.⁵⁰⁴ He was also in charge of visas for international students wanting to study in the hawza.⁵⁰⁵ Henceforth, there were multiple incentives for students to join the hawza. The possibility, certainly given by the Regime, of exemption from military service and a salary, even though small,⁵⁰⁶ were no little *stimuli* to join the hawza and Sadr,

⁵⁰⁰ Interview with Sheikh T., Baghdad (24/02/2024).

⁵⁰¹ Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁵⁰² Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyyeh (19/06/2024).

⁵⁰³ Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024). Unfortunately, investigating these aspects is extremely difficult since there was no official accounting for religious taxes, and questioning Sadr's representatives on the topic is also complicated. It is almost impossible to go beyond an official narrative, mainly stating that Sadr's supporters were poor, but their strength was in numbers, and that is how Sadr managed to support students, schools, poor people, and the like.

⁵⁰⁴ Interview with Sheikh Q., Najaf (13/06/2024). Hawza students had to obtain a certificate from the marja' and have it validated by the Military Administration to avoid military service. With Sadr, apparently, the Army Administration's validation was no longer necessary. Thus, the Regime gave Sadr this prerogative, which probably pushed many young Iraqis wanting to avoid the draft to attempt to take the Hawza exams. Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 379.

⁵⁰⁵ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, pp. 379, 380. Hasan states that Sadr used this privilege against his enemies in the hawza, denying visas to the students of non-Iraqis maraja', whose students came mainly from abroad. al-Sadr (2013). *Mawā'it wa Liqā'āt Ayah Allah al-'Uẓmā al-Sayyid al-Šahīd Muḥammad al-Šadr*, p. 37. Sadr declared that it was not the government that put him in charge of the hawza's affairs, but he could seize control of them by slow and progressive work. The government had participated but only in the measure in which they had also given control of the schools to al-Khu'i before him. We know, nevertheless, that al-Khu'i could not grant abstention from military service, for instance.

⁵⁰⁶ The salary for a student in the hawza in the 1990s was 5 dollars for Sadr's students and 15 for Sistani's, according to Sayyid A.. Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyyeh (19/06/2024). Nevertheless, another interviewee stated that Sadr was given a higher salary than other marajas and that this was one of the reasons why Sadr had so many students. Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024). But apparently, Sadr, in this

especially in the 1990s Iraq, ridden by the economic crisis accentuated by UN sanctions and with many people trying to evade the military draft.⁵⁰⁷

Many of these new students were not directly or only connected to Sadr; they followed other maraja' lessons and did not become particularly close to him. Nevertheless, they were attracted to the hawza by the small reopening that happened in that period, operated by Sadr, that played both on these material incentives and on a renewed interest in religion arising in Iraq and not only.⁵⁰⁸ Between 1992 and 1995, the number of hawza students increased to around 1500-2000 students, according to Sheikh G., a 70% increase compared to the previous numbers, in Sayyid Y. M.'s opinion ([See pictures n. 19, 20](#)).⁵⁰⁹

Students would live in these schools as we saw, and then follow lessons of different religious scholars in mosques around the old city of Najaf, like al-Hind Mosque, al-Ṭūsī, or al-Turk,⁵¹⁰ or in the schools themselves, knowing about the lessons by word of mouth.⁵¹¹ Sadr, for instance, held his lessons every Friday from 9 to 11 a.m. in the al-Ra's mosque ([See picture n. 21](#)) (now incorporated in the Imam Ali Sancturay).⁵¹² The religious studies curriculum in the hawza was more or less the same as every 'ulama, and the differences in the maraja's approaches were mainly discussed with smaller groups of students after the lessons.

Indeed, Sadr reunited in his office with some students to discuss and study personally with their master ([See pictures n. 22, 23](#)). Initially, according to Sheikh K., who started studying with Sadr in 1992, and also to Sheikh Q. K., who also joined the hawza in 1992, only a few students usually joined Sadr in his office, while others stayed away as he was known to belong to a family of Regime's opposers and students were afraid of being associated with him.⁵¹³ This situation rapidly changed during 1993, 1994, and 1995 when Sadr started having a larger following among students.⁵¹⁴ Still, even in this period, only a selected group of students would join Sadr in his office or at home to study and discuss

first period, did not have a large economic capability, and it was probably spreading it among his students, resulting in a lower salary. Furthermore, Sadr was particularly known for his equity in trying to pay scholarships to all students in the Hawza without making favoritism for students closer to him. Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024). Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁵⁰⁷ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0733 (27/04/99). BRCC 01_2348_0000_0534. BRCC 087-5-3-0687 (20/02/99).

⁵⁰⁸ Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁵⁰⁹ Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024).

⁵¹⁰ Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (03/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh T., Baghdad (24/02/2024). Sheikh Taher joined the Hawza in 1994 and became Sadr's student and representative.

⁵¹¹ Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024).

⁵¹² Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

⁵¹³ Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024). Interview with K., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

⁵¹⁴ Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

political problems and projects for Iraqi society with him.⁵¹⁵ These were Sadr's most trusted students, who later became his *wukala'*, with whom he could discuss politics without fears of infiltration from the Regime. Sayyid A., who was also Sadr's *mutawalli* for the Madrasa al-Akhund al-Kubra and later his representative in Kadhimiyah, was among them, studying with him and his son, Muqtada, the *Kitāb al-Kāfī*, a fundamental text of Shi'a jurisprudence.⁵¹⁶

From this brief analysis of Sadr's reopening of hawza's schools and gathering of new students, we can see how Sadr had little following still in 1992, as confirmed by people who joined him as students that year; he also had little following among Iraqi Shi'a as a marja', having thus small revenues in religious taxes and, so, few funds for schools and students' salaries. As we saw in the previous section, the spread of Sadr's marja'iyya after Golpaygani's passing in 1993 led to an increase in followers, which in turn led to an increase of revenues and the possibility of structuring the system of schools and students' salaries that we have described, conducting to a rise in the numbers of Sadr's students, that would then go on to gather more followers, creating a virtuous cycle. It fits, thus, perfectly in this scheme the fact that Sadr, early on in 1993, was still very selective with students, as he had few means to support them.⁵¹⁷ Then, while growing more affluent in 1995 - 1996,⁵¹⁸ he could support more students and, thus, recruit less selectively, as some interviewees have reported.⁵¹⁹

Sadr needed a large number of students; the word-of-mouth mechanism that had helped him in 1992 and 1993 was not enough to spread his marja'iyya rapidly, and lay Shi'as that would visit him and go back to their hometowns could not collect religious taxes for him or answer to *istiftā'āt* (questions to which the answer is expressed in a *fatwā*), increasing his standing as a marja'. To carry out these operations, Sadr needed representatives (*wukala'*), who were to be chosen among his students, as they needed to be religious men.

⁵¹⁵ Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024). Sheikh G. joined the hawza in 1993; before that, he had to escape to Jordan for a year as he was discovered by Iraqi Security Forces having a photo of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in his office at the University of Baghdad, where he worked. Interview with Sayyid H. K., Najaf (03/03/2024). Interview with T., Baghdad (24/02/2024).

⁵¹⁶ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyah (19/06/2024). Sayyid A. started studying in the hawza in 1994, while before, he was conscripted into the Iraqi army, where he served for 6 years.

⁵¹⁷ Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

⁵¹⁸ Interview with H., Najaf (13/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

⁵¹⁹ Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyah (19/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh G. (04/06/2024). Sheikh G. stated that around 1998, Sadr started being selective again with his choices for students; now, since he had many students at that time, he could afford to recruit only the best ones.

Consequently, Sadr needed many students to have many *wukala'* to spread his marja'iyya quickly throughout Iraq.⁵²⁰ He was forced to recruit his *wukala'* among new students. Usually, he could have chosen his representatives among other religious men in the hawza, as he apparently did at the very beginning of his marja'iyya, relying on another maraja's network to collect the few initial religious taxes paid to him.⁵²¹ However, many of the hawza's religious men, already integrated into other scholarly circles and networks, had some distrust toward Sadr from other religious men as they saw him connected to the Regime,⁵²² for the reasons we highlighted, and did not want to act as Sadr's *wukala'*. For this reason, and for Sadr's challenge of Sistani's claim to the marja'iyya, Sadr was excluded from religious circles connected to Sistani and the al-Khoei network, leaving him little choice but to form new representatives from his students, mostly very young and at the beginning of their clerical formation.⁵²³ Sadr even complains about a vigorous campaign against him by the rest of the members of the hawza, accusing him of being a Regime agent, which he, of course, vehemently denies.⁵²⁴

The suspicions of Sadr's collaboration with the Ba'ath were probably based on the Regime's tacit permission to Sadr to take control over Najaf's religious schools while contributing financially to their maintenance, as it had probably happened with the opening of Sadr's office. Such support from the Regime also continued the structural conditions that permitted and helped Sadr's rise to the marja'iyya and aided him in spreading his name, attracting students, opening schools, and supporting students with salaries. Thus, while looking at the construction of Sadr's marja'iyya, we have to consider together the two aspects of this expansion: on the one hand, the informal network, Sadr's charisma, and innovation; on the other, also the institutional support and structural conditions that helped Sadr in his rise to power in the hawza.

In the next section, we will look at the construction of Sadr's network of agents emerging from Sadr's students and describe its goals and functioning.

⁵²⁰ Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

⁵²¹ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 375.

⁵²² Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024).

⁵²³ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 375.

⁵²⁴ al-Ṣadr (2013). *Mawā'it wa Liqā'āt Ayah Allah al-'Uẓmā al-Sayyid al-Ṣahīd Muḥammad al-Ṣadr*, pp. 31 – 37.

2.1.3 The Construction and Politicization of the *Wukala'* Network.

To fulfill the needs that we just highlighted, Sadr started recruiting *wukala'* among his students. These representatives were sent to cities, towns, and villages throughout Iraq, even to Iraq's most remote regions, such as the Maysan (Maysān), Dhi Qar (Dī Qār), or Basra (Baṣrah) province, usually ignored by other *maraja'*, spreading Sadr's name, ideas, and legal-religious opinions and creating a vast and pervasive network.⁵²⁵ Jibouri states that Sadr constructed a network of representatives in Baghdad and southern Iraq.⁵²⁶ The *wukala'* would carry out mainly religious or cultural activities to spread religiosity,⁵²⁷ according to Sadr's particular vision, which we shall explore in this chapter's next section. Sheikh H. from Madina Saddam, a follower of Sadr in the 1990s and hawza student affiliated with Sadrism after 2003, related that Sadr's agents, after 1993, started holding lessons (*muḥāḍarāt* pl. of *muḥāḍrah*) on Islam in general, on the *ḥalāl* and the *ḥarām*, on *Šarī'ah*, on prayers, or spreading Sadr's *fatawa* and stories about Sadr himself and his opinions, or handing out his works.⁵²⁸ Religious occasions and celebrations were also used to gather crowds, give lessons about the sacred history of Islam, the Prophet, and the Shi'a imams, and educate the public about Islam.⁵²⁹ Also, communal prayers started to take place. There were no sermons, but people would gather and pray together in local mosques.⁵³⁰

The figure of the *wakil* was invested with such a role by a document (*Šahādah* or the *Wakālah*) given by Sadr himself ([See Documents n. 8, 9](#)). In the document, Sadr named one of his students or close collaborators as a *wakil* and outlined his powers and responsibilities. The *wakil* represented Sadr outside of Najaf; thus, he had to be a trustworthy person who would report Sadr's *fatawa*, collect religious taxes, and carry out correctly the other activities we outlined. Other than the *wukala'*, within this network used to spread Sadr's preachings, there were also those defined as *mumaṭilīn* (pl. of *mumaṭil*). These were Sadr's representatives, but without being formally invested with the *wakala'* or assigned to a

⁵²⁵ Interview with Sayyid J., Najaf (29/11/2023).

⁵²⁶ al-Jibouri (2020). *Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr*, p. 141. al-Sīmī (2019) *Dawr al-Marḡa'īyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 46.

⁵²⁷ Interview with Sayyid J., Najaf (29/11/2023).

⁵²⁸ Interview with Sheikh H., Baghdad (03/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh M., Baghdad (02/06/2024).

⁵²⁹ Interview with Sheikh S., Najaf (03/03/2024).

⁵³⁰ Interview with A., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

specific mosque, they carried out less formal assignments, like contacting a particular person for Sadr, talking with somebody, and carrying out more delicate missions. The *mumathilin* also usually did not dress in clerical garments but in *efendiyyah*, with “civilian clothes.”⁵³¹ As we shall see, another figure in this growing network was the *Imām Ṣalāah al-Ġuma‘ah* (Guide of the Friday prayer), especially after 1997. They were that *wukala’* assigned to lead a Friday Prayer in a specific location.

Sadr’s *wukala’* and *mumathilin* carried out, during the 1990s, an intense campaign of proselytism (*tablīġ*) to gather more followers for Sadr.⁵³² As we shall see in the next chapter, exploring the Friday prayers and the number of people attending these ceremonies, this campaign bore fruit.

Many of Sadr’s representatives were recruited among his students, and they were still studying while performing their activities as *wukala’*. Thus, many went back and forth between Najaf, where they studied, and their hometowns to report Sadr’s words and preachings.⁵³³ Sayyid H. K., one of Sadr’s students since 1993 and agent in Dīwāniyyah for four years, spent two days a week, from Thursday evening to Saturday morning in Diwaniyyah, carrying out the teaching activities outlined above and the rest of the week in Najaf, studying with Sadr.⁵³⁴ Abd al-Hussein Taher, another of Sadr’s students and agents, reports a very similar story; he also began studying with Sadr in 1993 and spent four days a week in Najaf and, then, from Thursday to Saturday in Madinat Saddam as a representative.⁵³⁵ Three people from Numaniyya joined Sadr’s students: N. Q., A. N., and M. N. They all went back from Thursday to Friday to their hometown to give lessons about religion and Sadr’s thought. They also hold communal prayers, without sermons, on Fridays. After the prayers, they had debates and questions from the people attending.⁵³⁶ Later, Sayyid K. H., Sadr’s student since 1992, was also sent to Nu’maniyyah as a representative.⁵³⁷ In Madina Saddam, lessons on Islam, especially on Fiqh, *‘Aqa’id*, *Mantiqa*, *taqāfah dīniyyah*, and Islamic history, were initially held in homes and almost secretly. Then, they also started taking place in local mosques. Sheikh M., one of Sadr’s agents in Madina Saddam, held lessons in different houses in the area, spending, for instance, every day from 8 to 9 am in

⁵³¹ Interview with M., Najaf (02/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

⁵³² Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

⁵³³ Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024). Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁵³⁴ Interview with Sayyid H. K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

⁵³⁵ Interview with Sheikh T., Baghdad (24/02/2024).

⁵³⁶ Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024).

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

one house giving a lesson, going then to another one from 9 to 10 am and continuing like that the whole day. He also participated in aid distribution, giving money he brought with him from Najaf to poor families in the Madina.

Also, another of Sadr's agents and later on *Imam Juma'*, Sheikh G., was assigned to Madina Saddam and held lessons on Thursdays and Fridays while studying in Najaf for the rest of the week. He also held secret lessons and gatherings outside Baghdad, in a Husseiniyyeh in the countryside to avoid Regime's control, with around 200 people attending the classes.⁵³⁸ These lessons had more political themes, according to Sheikh Hussein. He tried to spread the idea that Saddam was oppressing the Shi'a.⁵³⁹ Sayyid A. was also among Sadr's students-agents and split his time between Najaf and Kadhimiyya, where he was assigned as a *wakil* in 1995. He taught there in the al-Sa'adah mosque and prayed in the al-Ekilah mosque, as it could welcome more people. He recalls gathering 50 people in 1995, 100 the year after, 300 in 1997, and crowds of several thousand from 1998 onward. Also, Hazem A. was among the most vocal representatives against the Ba'athist Regime in late 1998 and in 1999.⁵⁴⁰ A. recalls that he took possession of the al-Ekilah mosque from a Sunni preacher, Muhammad Yasin Hussein al-Jibouri, that the Regime had placed in the mosque. Al-Jibouri, according to A., never showed up at the mosque since the mosque was at Kadhimiyya, a mainly Shi'a neighborhood, and nobody would have participated in his activities, both as he was Sunni and as the Regime placed him. Hajj Q., another of Sadr's followers from the 1990s, reports something similar: his family mosque in Madina Saddam, Jama' al-Hikmah, was under the Regime's control during the 1980s; however, in the 1990s, they could take back control of it, and it became an active Sadrist mosque ([See picture n. 24](#)).⁵⁴¹

As was usual for marja's *wukala'*, but also to root this growing movement in different Iraqi regions, *wukala'* started opening offices where they were sent to represent Sadr. They followed the model given by Sadr's *barrāni* (office/reception room, also known as *dīwān*) in Najaf, meaning a space open to followers and people to come and sit with the *wakil* and ask him questions on religion and guidance in general, with a bulletin board outside where events would be noted officially.⁵⁴² These were simple and spare places, also in line with the

⁵³⁸ Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

⁵³⁹ Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024).

⁵⁴⁰ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyah (19/06/2024).

⁵⁴¹ Interview with Hajj Q. Q. by phone (29/04/2024).

⁵⁴² Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024). Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). The *barrani* was open from 10 to 12 am daily apart from Saturday.

poverty of Sadr's network. In Madina Saddam, the office was just an empty room with a small and low table, behind which the *wakil* would sit on the ground receiving Sadr's followers. The office in the Madina during the 1990s was located in Jama' al-Hikmah.⁵⁴³ The other main offices were in Basra, Nassiriyyeh, and al-Ammara, with minor ones in other smaller cities.⁵⁴⁴ These were all opened between 1995 and 1996.⁵⁴⁵ In these offices, *wukala'* coordinated all the mentioned activities. The *wukala'*, as we have seen, organized lessons, answered questions on religion, spread Sadr's vision and word, and, as we shall see, coordinated some economic activities.

Some *wukala'* had more responsibilities than others and were responsible for specific regions, like Sheikh S., one of Sadr's most trusted collaborators, who was in charge of Basra and had some other representatives under his responsibility, or Sayyid A. in the critical area of Kadhimiyeh.⁵⁴⁶

Sadr also had *wukala'* abroad, like in Lebanon and Iran, and, at the end of the 1990s, even reached Iraqi communities in Europe with flyers and books. In 1997, Sadr tried to open an office in Qom, Iran, sending Sheikh Muhammad Sadeq and Sayyid Jafar al-Sadr, son of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, as his agents. The Iranian authorities immediately closed the office, probably as a consequence of the rumors about Sadr's connection with the Ba'ath Regime, and Sheikh Sadeq was sent back to Iraq while Sayyid Jafar received permission to stay.⁵⁴⁷ Throughout the 1990s, since 1993, he sent one of his earliest students, Sayyid Ali Y. M., to Beirut, Lebanon, to act as his agent there, but without much success, as the Lebanese Shi'a political and religious space was not open to new actors, according to an interview with Sayyid Y. M. himself.⁵⁴⁸

As we said, one of the main activities of the *wukala'*, other than reporting fatawa and collecting religious taxes, were lessons on Islam. The need to hold lessons about Islam and religion in general and to spread religion into Iraqi society derived from the perception that, in the 1990s, Iraqi society was, as described by one of Sadr's representatives, Sheikh S., *conservative but secular*.⁵⁴⁹ Henceforth, the need to spread religion in Iraqi society and the significant role of Sadr and his representatives in this direction. Mosques in Madina Saddam

⁵⁴³ Interview with Sheikh H. R. (19/02/2024). Interview with Sheikh T. (24/02/2024).

⁵⁴⁴ Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024).

⁵⁴⁸ Interview with Sayyid A. M., Dearborn (06/06/2023).

⁵⁴⁹ Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).

were said to be almost empty during the 1980s, if not for old people. Religious books during the 1980s were mostly banned; thus, educating people on religion lessons was necessary, as few could research for themselves.⁵⁵⁰ Moreover, many people were not interested in religion, according to Sadrists interviewed.⁵⁵¹ Before the advent of Sadr, it was not easy to see around Iraq Shi'a religious men, if not near the hawza schools or the sanctuaries.⁵⁵² For this very reason, Sadr ordered his representatives to wear their religious clothes and *'imāmah* (turban) when returning from the hawza to their hometowns instead of changing into "civilian" clothes. This show would signal to Iraqis as they started seeing many religious men again on the streets.⁵⁵³ Sadr's followers even credit Sadr and his representatives as the cause of the decrease in crime rates in Madina Saddam during the 1990s, as more people became religious and stopped committing crimes.⁵⁵⁴

The spreading of religion by Sadr's *wukala'* happened, as we already highlighted previously for other activities of Sadr's network, amidst the Iraqi Regime's "Faith Campaign" and in the general context of the rise of religiosity in the 1990s. This correspondence meant the *wukala'*s actions were going in the same direction as the Regime's. If, in the 1980s, wearing a beard, going to the mosque, or keeping religious books at home was dangerous and might have led to arrest, in the 1990s, the situation changed drastically.⁵⁵⁵ Many Sadrists believe that the Regime did not repress them during the 1990s while carrying out these religious activities, as the Regime was weaker in that period.⁵⁵⁶ However, as the events of February 1999 will demonstrate, the Regime still had all the capabilities, information, and power to take down the Sadrists if necessary. As we have already stated, the weakening of the Iraqi state did not mean a weakening of the Iraqi Regime and its repression apparatus, and, thus, the spreading of religiosity operated by the Sadrist network took place as it was in the Regime's interests to spread religiosity in the 1990s, or, at best, because some activities went unnoticed, as we shall see in following chapters. The same considerations are also valid for Sadr's *wukala'* taking possession of mosques and Husseinisyyas all over Iraq and the reopening of the schools in Najaf. A consequence of this situation was the fact that Sadr could nominate many *wukala'* and send them all over Iraq.

⁵⁵⁰ Interview with Sayyid K. H., Najaf (04/03/2024).

⁵⁵¹ Interview with A. and B. A., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

⁵⁵² Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024).

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid. Interview with Sheikh T., Baghdad (24/02/2024).

⁵⁵⁶ Interview with Sheikh S., Najaf (03/03/2024).

Contrary to Sadr's, other maraja' had few representatives. Thus, their *wukala'* were present only in major cities, mainly governorate capitals. They collected religious taxes, *zakat*, and *khums* for their marja' while answering the followers' questions and reporting the marja fatawa to the followers. At the same time, Sadr's *wukala'*, as was shown, were widely spread throughout Iraq, reaching even small villages and minor urban centers.⁵⁵⁷ Sadr had a vast number of agents. By 1996, he had 20 *wukala* and *mumathilin* just in Madina Saddam, 40 in Nasiriyah, and 400 between *wukala*, *mumathilin* and *imam juma'* by 1997 in all Iraq.⁵⁵⁸ Sadrist activists relate the impression that other maraja' during the 1990s were difficult to reach, and few people knew about their standing on many religious issues. Also, few people knew where the other maraja's agents' offices were and who these agents were.⁵⁵⁹ Furthermore, they did not organize any additional activities; they did not work to spread religion in society, teaching people about Islamic correct practices and those to avoid. They are described as almost in hiding and carrying out the bare minimum activities, such as answering questions from people who would go to them. They would not go to the people and push them to be more religious, as Sadr's agents did.⁵⁶⁰ Interestingly, followers of other maraja', mainly Sistani's, present in Iraq during the 1990s, confirm a similar version. They also focus on the fact that other maraja's agents did not go out to do proselytism as the Regime was repressing them, and it would have been a hazardous activity.

This situation would imply again that Sadr's agents were instead, at least, permitted to carry out their activities, with the Regime looking the other way most of the time. Furthermore, as we highlighted above, the *wukala'* carried out their activities in parallel with the "Faith Campaign"; thus, there was indeed a general opening toward religion. However, among the Shi'a, this opening happened primarily toward Sadr and his agents, who exploited it extensively, while other religious figures probably faced difficulties similar to the 1980s in terms of repression of the religious milieu.

To manage the growing complexity of the extensive network of agents, students, and other activities, Sadr structured his office with different "committees," each one led by one of his students.⁵⁶¹ In general, Sadr wanted to modernize the hawza administration, using bulletin boards, registers, and computers and opening *Ġāma'ah al-Ṣadr al-Dīnī* (The Sadr

⁵⁵⁷ Interview with Sayyid J., Najaf (29/11/2023).

⁵⁵⁸ Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024).

⁵⁵⁹ Interview with Sheikh E. H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁵⁶⁰ Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad 19/02/2024). Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁵⁶¹ Interview with N. E., Kufa (31/05/2024). Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024).

Religious University) to spread his educational philosophy.⁵⁶² The University was opened in the aforementioned school that belonged to the al-Hakim family, over which Sadr and the Hakim argued.⁵⁶³

These commissions were organized mainly by oral appointments to limit detection and infiltration, as there was an intense infiltration by the Regime in the hawza during the 1990s.⁵⁶⁴ The documents that we have seen to put a student in charge of a school, becoming a *mutawalli*, or the documents to name a *wakil*, are documents that every maraja would have published and, thus, not too suspicious for the Regime. Nevertheless, in the context of the development of Sadr's network as a political movement, these documents become a sort of internal documents of the movement's informal and rudimentary administration. Furthermore, by looking at the role that these documents assume in the growing Sadrist movement, from simple documents of the administration of a marja's network to administrative documents of a political movement, we also look at the moment that Sadr's network became, from a religious network only, a political movement.

The institution of these committees or commissions *per se* is not a political act or does not imply politicization of the movement by itself, just like the aforementioned documents are not necessarily political. However, by looking at it from the perspective of the whole history of the Sadrist movement in the 1990s, and thus knowing Sadr's attempt to build a strong popular movement to mobilize Iraqi people, as he would be forced prematurely to do at the end of 1998 – beginning of 1999, these commissions are to be seen as we described them: a first informal and rudimentary administration. These committees served to structure and manage the growing Sadrist network and number of followers with the objective of creating the possibility for later mobilization, thus their political function. Furthermore, following Asef Bayat's theory on social movements, we can understand the creation of these committees and everything connected, from Sadr's offices and Islamic tribunals to collecting religious taxes as the construction of the *alternative institutions* a movement builds to *conquer society* before conquering political power. Still following Bayat's theory, the values, and ideas spread by Sadr's *wukala'* and his followers through these institutions would represent the *alternative values* of a growing social movement, further strengthening the thought of seeing such organization of Sadr's network as a politicization of it. Of course, we

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 380.

⁵⁶⁴ Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

can not date it precisely, as we do not have a specific date for the formation of all committees, which also took place at different moments. Nevertheless, we can point to the period in which this process occurred, approximately 1995 – 1996.

Using networks of *wukala'* to spread a political movement and political ideas was not an innovation. Already, the Hizb al-Da'wa used agents of the marja'iyya as its own agents and representatives, and many of the party's leadership served in this role.⁵⁶⁵ Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim also similarly structured the SCIRI. He built a *small but effective bureaucracy* and a *system of young wukala* to mobilize followers, which Abdul Jabbar defined as a traditional method of recruitment and mobilization. The movement had a loose body of followers and sympathizers who attended ceremonies and events. According to Abdul Jabbar, this organization fuses modern and traditional aspects of Shi'i networks.⁵⁶⁶

Al-Hakim developed his movement in the 1980s, while Sadr did in the 1990s. They probably had little contact in the 1980s, and although the model was straightforward, it probably had a similar source of inspiration: the Hizb al-Da'wa structure, especially in the use of the marja'iyya's device (*ġihāz al-marġa' iyyah*), as both al-Hakim and Sadr were in Iraq while the Da'wa operated. Both were close to the party's environment. Hakim was even among the founding members of the Party. The Da'wa used the *wukala'* network of the marja'iyya, but it also had more structured party cells, unlike the Sadrist movement and the SCIRI. Another difference is that the Da'wa was not a mass movement, and the number of participants remained relatively low. At the same time, the SCIRI aspired to be a mass movement, but for the conditions it was created in Iran in the 1980s, it could never reach this stage.⁵⁶⁷ The only movement among these that became a mass movement was Sadrism, which in the late 1990s could muster up to 35.000 followers in its Friday prayer, making it more similar in its mass mobilization abilities to Khomeinism. It managed to do so by mixing the traditional mobilization method, using the *wukala's* network, informal connections, such as teacher-student relationships or family relationships, and using a more modern one with a structured administration, according to Mauriello, and echoing Abdul Jabbar's analysis of SCIRI.⁵⁶⁸ At the same time, we have to keep in mind that, even with this form of organization, the Sadrist movement remained a very fluid structure, with only part of it more rigidly designed and the rest made up of groups of people just orbiting around Sadr's agents,

⁵⁶⁵ Laval (2023). *L'appel de la révolution*, p. 310.

⁵⁶⁶ Abdul Jabar (2003). *The Shi'ite Movements of Iraq*, p. 249.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 250.

⁵⁶⁸ Mauriello (2011). *Descendants of the Family of the Prophet in Contemporary History*, p.

mumathilin and Sadrist's mosques or husseiniyyahs, making the extent of the Sadrist network probably challenging to evaluate.

At the head of this structure was Sadr, followed by Sayyid Asa'ad al-Nassiri, his secretary, who connected him with the rest of the organization.⁵⁶⁹

Under this first level, we find the different commissions: *Maktabah al-Ḥuqūq*, the commission charged with communications; *Ġurfah al-wukalā'*, *Ġurfah al-Istiftā'āt*, the commission for students, the commission for Islamic tribunals; and, finally, the *al-Lağnah al-ašraf la-Ṣalāah al-Ġuma'ah* (See table n. 2).

The *Maktabeh al-Huquq* was responsible for collecting *zakat* and *khums*, managing them, and, generally, managing all economic aspects of this administration. This committee was led by Sayyid Mustafa al-Sadr, aided by Sheikh Ali al-Nu'mani as a Shariatic Qadi (judge) and Sheikh Muhammad Ya'cubi (1960 –) for the redistribution to the poor (*musā'adāt*). It could work in multiple ways: in some cases, the money collected from Sadr's followers was directly redistributed to poor people or for local activities, such as the organization of religious ceremonies or festivities and charity, as in the case of Sheikh K.;⁵⁷⁰ in other cases, the entire sum collected was sent via the *wakil*, to Sadr in Najaf and then he redistributed, either to the schools of the hawza or for students' salaries, as we have seen, or to the poor.⁵⁷¹ In general, Sadr had to approve the use of more considerable sums in person.⁵⁷² Agents would even organize or propose certain activities in the areas under their "jurisdiction" and then go to Sadr to ask for financing for a particular celebration or some charitable activity.⁵⁷³ According to Hasan, when Sadr became sure enough of his support among Iraqis, he prohibited his followers from paying the *khums* to other marja', as he was the most knowledgeable marja' and, as we shall see, he claimed, and thus the deputy of the Hidden Imam.⁵⁷⁴

The *wukala'*, other than organizing lessons and answering religious questions, also tried to help their communities economically by organizing the neighborhood's mutual aid systems. They collected small amounts of money from all people living in a particular area and redistributed it to people taking turns or on specific occasions or needs.⁵⁷⁵ Sheikh H. S.,

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid. Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).

⁵⁷⁰ Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

⁵⁷¹ Interview with Sayyid K., Najaf (29/11/2023). Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024).

⁵⁷² Interview with Sayyid J., Najaf (29/11/2023).

⁵⁷³ Interview with Sheikh H. R., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

⁵⁷⁴ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 375.

⁵⁷⁵ Interview with A. B. J., Baghdad (23/11/2023).

a resident of Madinat al-Sadr, recalls that during the 1990s, he helped the local *wakil* of Sadr, Sheikh Ali Sadiq, deliver aid to poor families in the Madina. Sheikh H. would go to the *wakil*, who would give him some money; he would then go to the market, buy food or other goods, and then deliver them to the families. In particular, he also recalls that initially, he would go directly to people's houses. However, after that, one of the families was questioned by Regime security forces about Sheikh H.'s visits; the family answered that he was their cousin, but the security forces did not believe it and started surveilling their house. Thus, Sheikh H. began delivering the food at a secret meeting point that changed weekly and mostly during night hours. According to Sheikh H., this informal system, run mainly by very young followers of Sadr, Sheikh H. was 15 in 1995, was quite widespread in Madina Saddam and other areas with a robust Sadrist presence, even if the funds were not very considerable.⁵⁷⁶ Also, the practice of distributing aid secretly prevailed, according to several interviewees.⁵⁷⁷ This rudimentary informal welfare system was central to legitimizing the Sadrist movement among Iraqis and building its popularity. Providing services to the population when the state is absent is a strategy shared by many Islamist movements, from the Muslim Brotherhood in different countries to Hezbollah in Lebanon.⁵⁷⁸ Thus, while very complicated to explore as all the financial aspects of the Sadrist movement, the welfare system and charity network are central to the construction of the movement and Sadr's following.

Even though this commission generally dealt with *zakat* and *khums*, it was also in charge of *Ṣadaqa* (free donations/charity), coming mainly from some more affluent of Sadr's followers, like merchants or the like.⁵⁷⁹ A system of recipes was developed to keep track of donations, and representatives that brought the revenues of *zakat* and *khums* to Sadr received a receipt stating the sum, the date, and the like. The same happened for private donors.

⁵⁷⁶ Interview with Sheikh H. S., Baghdad (03/12/2023). Interview with A., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024). Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024). Other maraja also had revenues from outside Iraq, from their *wukala'* abroad. Sadr also had *wukala'* abroad, but his network was much weaker outside than inside Iraq, and vice versa for other maraja'.

⁵⁷⁷ Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

⁵⁷⁸ Clark, Janine (2004). *Islam, Charity, and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan and Yemen*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Cammett, Melani (2014). *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

⁵⁷⁹ Interview with Sheikh T., Baghdad (24/02/2024). Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024). Even though it was Sistani who was followed by richer Iraqi Shi'as and had, thus, higher revenue from religious taxes and donations, nevertheless, Sadrists declare that since Sadr's followers were numerous, they still managed to put together good revenues from religious taxes and donations, making up with numbers of what they lacked in riches.

Interestingly, this commission also dealt with all other Islamically legal forms of revenues, like revenues from goods taken from a state considered illegitimate. This theme will surface in Sadr's sermons, with heavy political implications, as we shall see in the following chapters.⁵⁸⁰

Another important commission was the one in charge of communications and spreading Sadr's works and knowledge about his visions on society, Islam, politics, and the like. This commission started printing and spreading Sadr's books around Iraq on stands, bookshops, and markets. Sadr would print and distribute his books at his own expense or try to sell them when he could to collect some funds, while other maraja' would not.⁵⁸¹ Sheikh E. H., one of Sadr's followers and students, even reports that in 1993, after seeing Sadr's books in the market, he got curious and learned in this way about Sadr and his marja'iyya, testifying to the utility of this way of spreading knowledge about the marja'.⁵⁸² They also printed and distributed Sadr's pictures, giving them to followers to hand in mosques and husseiniyyas.⁵⁸³ Another of Sadr's supporters, Sheikh H. S., remembers seeing Sadr's pictures in Madina Saddam between 1993 and 1995 for the first time and learning in this way of Sadr's existence. He then started buying his books in the market stands of Madina Saddam, starting to learn about his thoughts and philosophy.⁵⁸⁴ In 1998, with the beginning of the Friday prayers, audiocassettes of Sadr's sermons also started circulating. At the same time, a small magazine, *al-Huda*, edited by Sayyid Muqtada al-Sadr, who had a central role in this committee, began being published ([See documents n. 10, 11, 12](#)). It ran nine issues until 1999.⁵⁸⁵ In his research, Harith Hasan states that Sadr had permission to publish his books and *al-Hudà*. However, from a document from the Ba'ath archives, also examined in Kadhim's work, it emerges that the Regime, in late 1998 and early 1999, remarked that the magazine was being published illegally.⁵⁸⁶ We have no evidence of this in the books, but we could safely assume it was the same as for the magazine. In this case, just like we noticed for the schools, the Regime probably turned a blind eye to the Sadrist's activities and let them publish books and the *al-Huda* magazine. This happened without much problem until the end of 1998 and the beginning of 1999, when the tension started to increase between the

⁵⁸⁰ Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).

⁵⁸¹ Interview with Sheikh T., Baghdad (24/02/2024). Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024).

⁵⁸² Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁵⁸³ Interview with Sheikh T., Baghdad (24/02/2024).

⁵⁸⁴ Interview with Sheikh H., Baghdad (03/12/2024).

⁵⁸⁵ Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid A., Baghdad (10/06/2024).

⁵⁸⁶ BRCC 01_2983_0002_0109 (30/11/98). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0883 (12/01/99). Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza under Siege*, p. 39.

movement and the Regime; at this point, the Ba'ath officials started noticing that al-Huda was published illegally. This reading would fit perfectly with the idea that we will develop later in this work, that the Regime allowed Sadrist to carry out certain activities without much help but without much repression, until the end of 1998 when the tension started to rise and so did the repression by the part of the Ba'ath.

The *Ghurfa al-Wukala* Commission was entirely dedicated to the selection and organization of *wukala'* under the direction of Sayyid Jafa'ar al-Sadr, with Ismail al-Suwahili, and later on, from 1997, with J. K. and Mu'mal al-Sadr.⁵⁸⁷ This commission selected and provided certificates of *wakala* to the *wukala'* and managed all the activities connected to them, even though the *shahdah* was personally given by Sadr to each *wakil*, signed and with his seal.⁵⁸⁸ Even though, as we stated, Sadr needed large numbers of *wukala'* and recruited among his students, there were still some conditions to be recruited as a *wakil*. The candidate had to have studied in the hawza or be a student there, but it was not necessary to be a *mujtahid*; he had to be honest and well-mannered in an Islamic sense, and, finally, he had to “encourage what is right and forbid what is wrong,” following the Islamic prescription “*al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*.”⁵⁸⁹ The *wakala* lasted only one year; after that, it had to be renewed by Sadr.⁵⁹⁰

Then, the *Ghurfa al-istifta'at* Commission dealt with fatawa and their publication and diffusion. The people responsible for this office were first Sheikh Qasim al-Ta'i, then Sheikh Muhammad al-Ya'cubi, and lastly, Sayyid J. K..⁵⁹¹ This office would collect all questions to Sadr on matters of Islamic law and then publish the answers and send them to the *wukala'*, who would spread Sadr's opinions among his followers. During most of the 1990s, these fatawa were not openly political but primarily concerned with religious aspects of life.⁵⁹²

Another commission dealt with student affairs and administration of the schools, and Sayyid H. K., the *Katib al-Tullab*, headed it.⁵⁹³

Finally, Islamic tribunals (*Maḥkamah Šara'iyyah*) were also organized and controlled by a commission in Sadr's office. Sheikh S. recalls how he was the Shariatic Qadi nominated

⁵⁸⁷ Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

⁵⁸⁸ Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).. Interview with Sayyid H. K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

⁵⁸⁹ Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024). Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024). The status of mujtahid was confirmed by a shahadah by a marja', and the student's peers and masters were recognized.

⁵⁹⁰ Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

⁵⁹¹ Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).

⁵⁹² Interview with Sayyid J., Najaf (29/11/2023).

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

by Sadr for Basra and its province.⁵⁹⁴ Also, Sheikh Ali Bahdi and Sayyid Mustafa al-Sadr were also Islamic judges in this system.⁵⁹⁵ Mustafa administered Islamic justice in the Sherbiani school.⁵⁹⁶ Also, al-Jibouri mentions the establishment of Islamic courts in *all Iraqi towns* to avoid using the government's courts, thus establishing alternative institutions.⁵⁹⁷ Many people did not attend these courts and had limited influence. Many judges presiding over the courts were very young and deferred many cases to Sadr himself. As for other activities from the Sadrists, the Regime tolerated these courts but feared them more than other Sadrist projects, according to Sheikh H..⁵⁹⁸ This preoccupation was probably due to the fact that the courts, more than charity or lessons, were trespassing the state's prerogatives.

In 1997, the commission to manage prayers, the *al-Lajnah al-Ashraf la-Salah al-Juma'a*, was also added to this administration structure. The commission named the *A'imah al-Ġuma'ah* (pl. of Imam) in the different mosques under Sadrist control. It gave themes for the sermons, sent them to the imams, and generally managed prayers. The head of the commission, the fundamental role of connection between Sadr and the Imam al-Juma'a was initially given to Sheikh Ali Sadiq, then was replaced by Mu'mal al-Sadr, helped by Ali al-Nu'mani and Nadir al-Quraishi.⁵⁹⁹ Sheikh S. was, for instance, Imam Juma' in 1997 in Nasiriyyeh and Baghdad. There were around 70 imam juma' between 1998 and 1999.⁶⁰⁰

The organization of *wukala'*, Islamic courts, commissions, lessons in mosques, and food and aid distributions reached a level in the late 1990s that, according to a probably overstated definition by Sheikh S. H. and by Sheikh G., brought to the creation of a state inside the state.⁶⁰¹ Even if the definition is exaggerated, it is probably true that there was a pervasive and organized (mostly permitted by the Regime) network connected to Sadr, his followers, and the *wukala'* that carried out the abovementioned activities. Sheikh G. and Sayyid A. compare the prerogatives of a *wakil* to those of a regional governor who had responsibility over a region on almost everything.⁶⁰²

⁵⁹⁴ Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).

⁵⁹⁵ Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024). Al-Hudà, year 1419 h./1998, n. 2.

⁵⁹⁶ Hassan (2021). *The Roots of the Islamic Movement*, p. 376.

⁵⁹⁷ al-Jibouri (2020). *Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr*, p. 141. al-Sīmī (2019) *Dawr al-Marġa'iyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 46. Mervin, Sabrina (1995). *La quête du savoir à Nağaf. Les études religieuses chez les chi'ites imâmites de la fin du XIXe siècle à 1960*. Studia Islamica, No. 81, pp. 165 – 185, p. 173.

⁵⁹⁸ Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁵⁹⁹ Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

⁶⁰⁰ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).

⁶⁰¹ Interview with Sheikh S., Najaf (03/03/2024). Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024).

⁶⁰² Ibid. Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024).

This widespread network, among other things, supported the spread of Sadr's ideas and works, diffusing Sadr's vision of Islam and shaping the movement's attractiveness for its followers and its vision of Iraqi society and politics. Consequently, in the next section of this chapter, we will explore some of Sadr's most influential works and ideas.

2.2 Second Chapter: Sadr's Works and Preachings.

In his formative years and during his house arrest in the 1980s, Muhammad al-Sadr penned many books, pamphlets, and articles on a wide range of topics, gaining his reputation as a knowledgeable and versatile scholar. This production, on the one hand, was meant to support Sadr's standing as a scholar and help his claim to the *marja'iyya*; on the other hand, it was also meant to offer an alternative worldview, the *alternative values* of Asef Bayat, to Sadr's followers. Hence, Sadr's works will have to be read within this framework and keep in mind the use of their contents made by Sadr in constructing his movement. In this section, we will try to analyze some of the most politically charged of Sadr's works and, after that, examine some of his teachings, deriving from these works and the work of dissemination done by his *wukala*. In this way, we will explore the ideas that his students, *wukala*, and followers spread throughout Iraq during the 1990s thanks to the network structure we analyzed in previous sections of this chapter and the word-of-mouth mechanism explored at the end of chapter one.

2.2.1 The Encyclopedia of Imam Mahdi.

2.2.1.1 The publication of the Encyclopedia and its relevance.

The *Encyclopedia of Imam Mahdi* was first published in 1992. However, Sadr's biographers state he completed the first volume in 1972 when he was just 29. We also know that Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr wrote the introduction to the Encyclopedia and this was published, also separately, in 1977.⁶⁰³ According to another biographer, and to Sadr himself in the Hannaneh interview, he started writing the Encyclopedia when he was 15 years old, in 1958, after receiving from his father's uncle, al-Sayyid Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Ṣadr a book on the Sunna tradition on the Madhi and deciding to write one himself.⁶⁰⁴ The work thus reflects an almost lifelong interest of al-Sadr and is one of the essential written expressions of his interest in mysticism. The *Encyclopedia* is a massive desk study collecting much information

⁶⁰³ al-Asadī (2017). *al-Ṣadr al-Ṭānī*, p. 38. al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, pp. 436, 437.

⁶⁰⁴ 'Alī (2000). *Iḡtiyāl Ṣa'ab*, p. 25. al-Ṣadr (2013). *Mawā'iṭ wa Liqā'āt Ayah Allah al-'Uẓmā al-Sayyid al-Ṣahīd Muḥammad al-Ṣadr*, p. 20.

already known to Shi'a scholars. Nevertheless, it collects this information and tries to solve certain disputes regarding Imam Mahdi, such as his presence among believers or the possibility of accelerating his return.

Still, the *Encyclopedia's* most crucial aspect is connected with its significance as one of the main works of al-Sadr and what that implies. The fact that Sadr produced, as one of his most important works, a four-volume work on Imam Mahdi, shows the centrality of this topic in his thought.⁶⁰⁵ Even more, this work is crucial in building one of the main themes of Sadrist discourse and, drawing on one of the essential Shi'a beliefs, creating a discourse of millenarist expectation and potential hope for Sadr's followers.

As Amir Moezzi has argued, *to witness the return of the Mahdi and to join his army are the highest hopes of Imami believers*.⁶⁰⁶ Drawing on this statement, we can understand how the Mahdist beliefs and hope in his return had a central role in mobilizing part of the Iraqi Shi'a community. Another interesting point of Sadr's work is the political and activist connotation given to Mahdism, which, as pointed out by Jean-Pierre Filiu, is not always a given.⁶⁰⁷ As a matter of fact, the belief in the future but the distant return of an awaited savior was often the excuse for maintaining the *status quo*.⁶⁰⁸ Nevertheless, in the history of Shi'ism, there have been significant examples of the political use of Mahdism, as seen in our discussion of Shi'a debates on authority and power.⁶⁰⁹ In this case, Mahdist beliefs have been deployed as a weapon against the established system, in all its expressions, calling for a total change brought forth by a messiah-like figure. Peter Harling has argued that no other Islamic political movement in the 20th century has so strongly emphasized the Mahdist doctrines and the need to work for the Imam's return as the Sadrist Movement.⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁵ Some accounts even mention the intention of a work of ten volumes, with six completed and four published. Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Taḥaṣṣīṣah (2010). *Muqaddimah lal-Āḍwā' 'alā tawrah al-Ḥusseīn*. Other accounts even mention twelve parts of this Encyclopedia. (al-Asadī (2017). *al-Ṣadr al-Tānī*, p. 48.

⁶⁰⁶ Moezzi, Amir (1998). *Eschatology iii. Imami Shi'ism*. Encyclopaedia Iranica, (<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/eschatology-iii>).

⁶⁰⁷ Filiu, Jean-Pierre (2009). *The Return of Political Mahdism*. Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, Vol. 8, pp. 26 – 38.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

⁶⁰⁹ Bashir, Shahzad (2001). *Messianic Leadership in Late Medieval Shi'ism*, In Walbridge, Linda S., *The Most Learned of the Shi'a. The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid*, Oxford University Press, pp. 21 – 33. Shahzad investigates the cases of two Shi'a clerics, Muhammad Nūrbahāš (d. 1464) and Muhammad Bin Falaḥ Muṣā'ṣā' (d. 1462), who used Mahdist beliefs to rally political support around them and try to subvert the established system and ruling elites of their times. They also claimed that both of them, to be the Mahdi, returned, thus bringing messianic beliefs to a level never reached by Sadrism. Nevertheless, these two examples are among the many possible examples of the politicization of Mahdist beliefs and *how the dormant messianism that forms the very basis of Twelver Shi'ism can be actualized under favorable historical conditions* (p. 22) in a similar example to Sadr's actualization.

⁶¹⁰ Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*.

Sadr's work deals with the Mahdi's life and the doctrines concerning the disappearance of the Imam, his return, and the reign he will build after his appearance, subsequently leading to Doomsday. In a mystic and eschatological sense, the rule of the Mahdi will also prepare humanity for its real goal, the full knowledge and practice of Islam.⁶¹¹

According to Shi'a traditions, the Mahdī, the Twelfth Imam Abu'l-Qāsem Moḥammad b. Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī was born on the 15th of Sha'aban of the year 255 of the Hegira (868 CE). He was the son of the Eleventh Imam, Hasan al-ʿAskarī (al-ʿAskari) (845-873), and Narcisso or Nargīs, the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor, according to one of the most well-known versions.⁶¹² An aura of mysticism and divinity shrouds the Imam's birth and youth. The Mahdi's mother was foretold in a dream that she would become the mother of the awaited savior. She was converted to Islam in a dream by Fāṭimah, daughter of the Prophet and wife of Ali, and promised as the bride of Imam Hasan al-ʿAskari by Jesus to the Prophet Muhammad.⁶¹³ After these dreams, full of references to the religious history of Islam, the Byzantine princess started a voyage to rejoin his future husband and finally married Imam ʿAskari.⁶¹⁴ After the marriage, Muhammad al-Mahdi was miraculously born, without any sign of pregnancy being shown by his mother, to hide his birth from the spies of the Abbasid caliphs. From the beginning, the Imam showed supernatural abilities and miraculous knowledge of Islam and the Qur'an, which he could recite moments after his birth.⁶¹⁵ After a few years, and after having presented the newborn to a small circle of trusted people as his heir, Imam al-ʿAskari died.⁶¹⁶ From the moment of the death of Imam ʿAskari in 873, his son, Imam al-Mahdi, entered what later would be defined as the first of the two phases of Occultation.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹¹ Corbin, Henry (2015). *L'imam nascosto*. Milano: SE Edizioni, pp. 74-75.

⁶¹² Ibid, pp. 42 and following. The Imam Askari (Askar means soldier in Arabic) is known by this name as he was kept under strict surveillance by the Abbasid caliphs in Samarra, at that time serving as a military base for the caliph's troops. There are several versions of this story, and Sadr accounts for them all. al-Ṣadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, Vol. 1. Other accounts also support the idea that the mother of the Mahdi was a Nubian slave. See Moezzi, Amir (2007). *Islam in Iran vii. The Concept of Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism*. Encyclopaedia Iranica. (<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/islam-in-iran-vii-the-concept-of-mahdi-in-twelver-shiism>).

⁶¹³ Corbin, (2015). *L'imam Nascosto*, p. 50. al-Ṣadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, Vol. 1, pp- 241-252. Sadr debates the reality and possibility of her dreams and her conversion to Islam in a dream, judging it sound in the end.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 241-255.

⁶¹⁵ Corbin, (2015). *L'imam Nascosto*, p. 56. Sadr, vol. 1, pp. 258, 262.

⁶¹⁶ al-Ṣadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, Vol. 1, p. 275.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., p. 318.

During *al-Ġaibah al-Ṣuġrā* (the Minor Occultation), Imam Mahdi kept in contact with the Shi'a community through his *wukalā'*.⁶¹⁸ This period lasted 70 years, and four successive *wukala'* carried out this duty. Finally, at the end of this period, in 942, the Imam left his last message to the fourth of his agents, warning him that he, the agent, would die within six days and that he should not name any successor as *wakil* as he, the Mahdi, would disappear into the *al-Ġaibah al-Kubrā* (Major Occultation), and nobody would see him until the day of his return.⁶¹⁹

From this moment, the Major Occultation starts, the period where Imam Mahdi is totally hidden, and the Shi'a community has no contact with him. Nevertheless, according to Shi'a beliefs, he is still alive and waiting for the right moment to return.⁶²⁰

The Mahdi entered into occultation to protect his life, to be independent of temporal rulers, all adversaries of the Mahdi, and illegitimate as not part of Muhammad's family. This Major Occultation, for which the Minor one was a preparation, also represents a test of the believers' faith. Finally, a fourth reason is behind this disappearance, but it will be revealed only when the Mahdi returns.⁶²¹

From this moment on, the Shi'a community awaits the Mahdi's return to come back and bring equity and justice to Earth, avenging all wrongs done against the Shi'a community and lifting it from the oppression that has afflicted it for centuries. Thus, the call on the Mahdi's return has a decisive role in raising Shi'a believers' hopes near the end of their sufferings, as we shall see more in-depth later.

The Major Occultation is the topic of the second volume of Sadr's *Encyclopaedia*. During this period, the community has no direct contact with the Imam. Thus, it is a period of incertitude and difficulties in which Sadr and his followers live. Hence, studying Sadr's description of this period and its challenges is a fruitful way to explore Sadr's Mahdist Doctrines and their possible application to Sadr's followers' reality.

The Mahdist doctrines proposed by Sadr in his work, just like the brief overview of the Mahdi's life we just presented, are the product of centuries of Shi'a scholars' elaboration on Mahdism. This development of what came to be considered the orthodox understanding

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., p. 329.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., p. 585.

⁶²⁰ Corbin, (2015). *L'imam Nascosto*, pp. 56-68. The minor occultation had the goal of saving the Shi'a community from the shock of a complete and sudden disappearance, providing thus a period of transition. Sadr (1977). *Bahāṭ ḥawl al-Mahdī*, p. 65.

⁶²¹ Moezzi (2007). *Islam in Iran vii*. Corbin states that men forced the Mahdi into hiding with their evil behavior. Corbin, (2015). *L'imam Nascosto*, p. 68.

of Mahdism began to emerge around the 10th century.⁶²² The first significant work discussing the twelve Imams and the two periods of Occultation is Ibn Abi Zaynab No‘mānī’s *Kitāb al-Ġaibah* (d. ca. 956 or 971). From the study of the chains of transmission used in this book and other seminal works on the Occultation of the twelfth Imam, such as *Kamāl al-Dīn* by Ibn Bābuya (d. 991) or Kulānī’s hadīth collection (d. 940-941), it appears that the concept of Occultation has been adopted from other Shi’a trends, which considered other Imams, such as the fifth or the seventh, as the Mahdi. Furthermore, in other books, we can find alternative theories regarding Occultation, such as the idea that the Mahdi is only present in his spiritual substance in the world or that he secretly had a son and thus perpetuated the line of Imams until the day of Judgment.⁶²³

The analysis of older works on the Mahdi and his Occultation is not the focus of this work. Still, it is helpful to understand the historical process that produced the doctrines that Sadr collected in his work and their connection with the political and ideological struggle between different trends within Shi’ism.

Furthermore, this initial adaptation period of Twelver’s doctrines was also reflected in the difficulties of the succession of the Imams. Every time a recognized Imam died, an internal struggle within the Shi’a community took place to decide his successor, often resulting in schism and the creation of new sects, such as Ismailism.⁶²⁴ Also, Sadr’s account of the Mahdi’s life narrates how, after the death of Imam al-Askari, Jafar Bin Ali, the brother of Imam al-Askari and the uncle of the Mahdi, tried to be recognized as the Imam at the place of the Mahdi, reenacting a dispute that had taken place almost after the death of every Imam.⁶²⁵

Said Arjomand, in his work on the development of Mahdism in Twelver Shi’ism, highlights how the emergence of Mahdist doctrines solved the problems of the Imams’ succession. With the Twelfth Imam Occultation, the Imam’s line ended, closing any dispute about their succession, at least among those who would later become Twelvers, and reducing

⁶²² Moezzi (2007). *Islam in Iran* vii. It must be emphasized that the concept of two occultations, the first shorter than the second, originated in the beliefs of the *Wāqefis* of the seventh Imam Musā al-Kāzem. For them, these two occultations constituted a distinctive sign of the Mahdi, obviously here alluding to the two periods of imprisonment of the seventh Imam, the first of a shorter period under the caliphate of the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Mahdi (r. 775-85), and the second, lasting until the death of the Imam, ordered by Hārūn al-Rašid (r. 786-809). This *Wāqefi* origin also seems at issue in a hadīth, preserved by the Twelver Shi’ite corpus, that mentions the imprisonment of the Savior.

⁶²³ Ibid. Moezzi, Amir (1998). *Eschatology* iii.

⁶²⁴ Momen (2016). *Shi’a Islam*, p. 26 and followings.

⁶²⁵ al-Šadr (1992). *Mūsū‘ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, Vol. 1, pp. 287, 288.

the number of splits within the Shi'a community at any Imam's death.⁶²⁶ Nevertheless, this solution did not end all problems concerning authority within the community. The network of Imams' agents, which was started under the seventh Imam, Musa al-Kadhim, when the Major Occultation began, on the one hand, found in this event the solution to the continuous succession crisis among the Shi'a, gaining power and building the theory of Occultation drawing from Shia' heterodox beliefs. However, the clerics started debating who would lead the Shi'a community from that moment. Thus, this debate opened a new problem of authority within the community concerning the possibilities of leadership during the absence of the Imam.⁶²⁷ As we have seen in the introduction, this was one of the main preoccupations of the debate within political Shi'ism in the second half of the twentieth century, and Sadr also took part in it.

This brief mention of Shi'a's disputes over the Imamate, the identity of the Mahdi, or the nature of his Occultation can help us look at the work of Sadr as the collection of a solidified body of doctrines and knowledge that emerged from centuries of struggle over these same doctrines. Thus, Sadr's work and his re-elaboration on these doctrines are also part of a political and religious struggle over the concepts of Imamate, Occultation, and the Mahdi's nature. This contextualization gives us an example of how Sadr's work on the Mahdi has a central political relevance within the Shi'a community and in developing a social movement, as we shall see later in more depth.

Thus, this section will analyze the Encyclopaedia's second volume, which comprises four volumes of around 600 pages each, as we have already highlighted. We decided to focus on this particular moment of the Mahdi's story as the Great Occultation is the period lived by Sadr and his followers, the moment when the Shi'a community has no contact with the Imam, and the period that precedes the return of the Mahdi and thus the moment to prepare this return. Considering these aspects, we chose to analyze Sadr's ideas regarding the behavior to follow during the Mahdi's absence, the way to prepare for his return, and the question of the guidance of the community while he is hidden. In our understanding of Sadr's thought and Sadrism, looking at the behavior to follow during the Great Occultation and the preparation for the return of the Imam are central topics in exploring the Sadrist discourse

⁶²⁶ The number twelve, with an a posteriori elaboration, was recognized as the destined number of Imams. Arjomand (1996). *The Consolation of Theology*, p. 550.

⁶²⁷ In the wake of the development of the theory of Occultation, the Imamate became, from a theory of authority, a topic of theology, where the Imams were otherworldly mediators for salvations, and the debate on authority started concerning only their representatives, that would later become the representatives of the religious establishment. Arjomand (1996). *The Consolation of Theology*, pp. 551, 570.

and ideology. Therefore, the analysis will consist of reconstructing Sadr's thought and doctrines exposed in the *Tārīḥ al-Ġaībah al-Kubrā* and searching for possible correspondences, contacts, or influences from other Shi'a thinkers or movements.

2.2.1.2 The Mahdi, the Shi'a Hope, and the historical context.

As we have started to outline in the previous paragraph, Mahdist beliefs express the idea that the twelfth Imam disappeared in 873 for the first period of Occultation, during which he maintained contact with the community through his wukala'. Later on, in 942, he entered a second and Major period of Occultation, cutting all contact with his believers' community.

After this moment, as we have seen, there was a period of adaptation in the Shi'a community, during which the Mahdist Twelver doctrines began taking shape, later described in Sadr's work. In the following centuries, Twelver Shi'ism became the primary current in Shi's Islam and thus made its conception of the Mahdi the dominant one.⁶²⁸

Apart from these historical considerations, the Mahdist beliefs expressed by Twelver Shi'ism present the idea that, after 942, the Shi'a community entered a period of *intizār* (waiting) (intizhar) for the Mahdi's return. This idea of waiting for the Mahdi's imminent or far return, according to the different readings of Mahdist doctrines, is the key to understanding the millenarist sentiment living at the heart of Shi'a beliefs,⁶²⁹ its influence, and importance in the construction of a movement such as Sadrism.

The belief in the return of the Mahdi is one of the most essential elements in Shi'ism, along with the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, which we will analyze later in this chapter. This return, eagerly awaited, represents hope for the Shi'a community to turn around its self-described historical role as an oppressed minority and regain the position of leaders of the Ummah (the Islamic Nation) following the lead of the prophet's family.⁶³⁰

⁶²⁸ Other Shi'a trends were more prominent at the beginning of Islamic history, such as the Fatimids or also the Ismailis, and they presented different conceptions of Mahdism. On this point, see Moezzi (2007). *Islam in Iran vii*.

⁶²⁹ Bashir (2001). *Messianic Leadership in Late Medieval Shi'ism*, p. 22.

⁶³⁰ The modality of this waiting is one of the central points of innovations in Sadr's work. In his work on the Mahdi and Shi'a eschatology, Amir Moezzi states that, according to most Shi'a traditions, the Mahdi's return has to be waited *patiently and piously*. Moezzi (2007). *Islam in Iran vii*. On the other hand, as we will see later on in this paragraph, Sadr proposes a more active approach to this wait, proposing activist behavior to prepare for Mahdi's return.

The return of the Mahdi will happen at *the end of time* to indicate that his return would end history as we know it and mark the beginning of his reign. This rule would last several years; traditions differ on the exact number until the Day of Judgment.⁶³¹ The *end of time* would also correspond with the moment when *Earth is filled with tyranny and injustice* when the Mahdi appears to fight these evils and establish justice and peace.⁶³²

In his *Encyclopedia*, Sadr states that *the Mahdi will appear and fill Earth with equity and justice after it has been filled with injustice and oppression*.⁶³³

The coming of the Imam, traditionally, is preceded by several signs. Among these is the widespread invasion of the Earth by Evil, overcoming knowledge by ignorance, and the loss of any sense of the sacred and all links between man and God, something that, according to Sadrists, was happening in Iraq, as we have seen reporting their vision of Iraq as a secular society.⁶³⁴ These require the manifestation and the rising of the Qā'im (Qa'im) (another name for the Mahdi, meaning *the one who rises*), or else humanity will be overwhelmed by darkness.⁶³⁵

After these signs, the Mahdi becomes manifest, having miraculously conserved his youth, and defeats the evils and re-establishes on Earth peace and justice and Islam in his true form, making it the universal religion and thus fulfilling humanity's destiny of being

⁶³¹ al-Ṣadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, Vol. 2, pp. 253, 254. The return of the Mahdi will bring [...] the creation of a complete society and complete humanity represented by a group of individuals who live following the highest level of justice and truthfulness and detachment from everything except the worship of God Almighty. [...] [The Mahdi's return will] create a just State that governs society with truth and justice, according to God's law.

⁶³² Significantly, the Mahdi also comes back to revenge the killing of Imam Hussain, establishing even more strongly the link between the two key figures and episodes of Shi'a history, the Martyrdom of Imam Hussain and the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam. Moezzi (2007). *Islam in Iran* vii.

⁶³³ al-Ṣadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, Vol 1, p. 589. There are explicit references in the hadith that *Earth will be filled with injustice and oppression before the appearance of the Mahdi (peace be upon him) on the promised day*. al-Ṣadr (1992). *Ibid.*, pp. 304- 305.

⁶³⁴ The evil that the Imam comes back to fight is generated by men and by their abandonment of Islam's straight path. Sadr states: *Therefore, Earth is filled with injustice and oppression, but not by coercion, by God Almighty or from others. Rather, considering men's abandonment of their faith in favor of their interests and of temptation and fear, they are the source of oppression. [...] The individual's duty toward Islamic law is only to follow it, strengthening his faith and working against injustice. This approach will create the condition for [the Mahdi's] appearance and the final defeat of injustice and oppression*. *Ibid.*, pp. 377-378. In this passage, Sadr also highlights that the conditions for the Mahdi's return can be created. Thus, men's actions can influence the moment of the return, and this can be anticipated with activism, as we shall see more in detail in the next section.

⁶³⁵ Traditions also count five signs that will precede the manifestation of the Mahdi. The coming of Sufyāni, the enemy of the Mahdi who will guide an army against him. The advent of Yamani, an ally of the Mahdi who will appear in Yemen and support the Imam. A powerful scream of supernatural origin came from the sky and called men to defend the Imam. The swallowing of an army of the Mahdi's enemy in the desert between Mecca and Medina. And, finally, the assassination by Meccans of the messenger of the Mahdi, called Nafs al-Ẓakiyah. Moezzi (2007). *Islam in Iran* vii.

perfect in religion, in the worship of God.⁶³⁶ He will also reveal the esoteric meaning of Islam and its sacred scriptures, closing the initiation cycle after the prophecy cycle, sealed with the prophet Muhammad's death. In this final battle against evil, the Mahdi will be helped by angels and other supporters, among whom the masses of the oppressed will rise with him to fight for their liberation.⁶³⁷

It is not a case that the *Encyclopaedia* is opened with a quote from the Qur'an remembering how the oppressed and weak on Earth will be the heir of the prophet, raising hopes of the Shi'a community and its most disadvantaged strata: *And We desired to bestow a favor upon those who were deemed weak in the land, and to make them the Imams, and to make them the heirs.*⁶³⁸

The return of the Mahdi in Shi'a doctrines appears to have two dimensions, as highlighted by Amir Moezzi. A universal or collective one will bring a radical change in the history of humanity, and an internal or individual one will transform the believer's soul.⁶³⁹ Both aspects are central to Muhammad al-Sadr's work, as we shall see.

In Shi'ism, as we have already highlighted, the return of the Mahdi became an article of faith and constitutive dogma of the religious doctrine.⁶⁴⁰ The eschatology in Shi'ism is totally dominated by the figure of the Mahdi and his soteriological mission.

The soteriological mission of the Mahdi is central in Shi'a eschatology, but the concept of vengeance is also prominent. The Imam will return for revenge for Imam Hussain's assassination, the third Imam, and the loss of power of the Prophet's family. These two events, according to Shi'a, stopped Islam from fulfilling its role as a communal religion for all humanity, destined to save all peoples.⁶⁴¹ With the return of the Mahdi, the two aforementioned events will be avenged, and Islam will be re-established as the religion that will save humanity, completing the Mahdi's collective revolution. All believers will also reach a new spiritual level of belief and be perfect in their worship, thus completing the individual revolution brought forth by the Mahdi.⁶⁴²

⁶³⁶ [...] *The purpose of creation is to reach perfection. This is represented by directing every belief and thought to God Almighty and obeying to Him and His justice in every movement [...]*. al-Sadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, Vol. 2, pp. 253, 254. In this extract, Sadr highlights the final purpose of creation and the final goal of humanity, foreseeing men's destiny once the Mahdi returns. Sadr defines this final goal of humanity as the *complete just thesis* supported by Islam, as we shall see later on.

⁶³⁷ Moezzi (2007). *Islam in Iran* vii.

⁶³⁸ al-Sadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, Vol. 1, p. 14. (Qur'an 28:5).

⁶³⁹ Moezzi (1998). *Eschatology* iii.

⁶⁴⁰ Moezzi (2007). *Islam in Iran* vii.

⁶⁴¹ Moezzi (1998). *Eschatology* iii.

⁶⁴² Ibid.

Considering these expectations and beliefs connected to the Twelfth Imam, we understand how his return constituted a great hope for every Shi'a believer. This hope was fuelled by centuries of diffusions of Mahdist ideas on one side and, on the other, centuries of oppression, also directly experienced by Sadr and his followers in their lives. These historical difficulties are often seen as reflected in the *political revanchist attitude* of Imamism and crystalized around the hope of the final return of the Mahdi.⁶⁴³ Thus, the hope of such a return presents a great mobilization potential, used by Sadr to mobilize broad sections of the Iraqi Shi'a population.⁶⁴⁴

The conditions for spreading such hope were ripe in Iraq in the 90s. As highlighted in the first chapter, the 90s were difficult for Iraq and Iraqis. The population was living in a country hit by UN sanctions, with all their repercussions. The country's infrastructures were severely damaged during the '91 Gulf War, the Iran-Iraq War, and the attacks by the US-led coalition during the decade. Lastly, the internal repression by Saddam's Regime and the deterioration of economic and social conditions also contributed to a problematic situation.⁶⁴⁵ All these elements prepared a situation that left many Iraqis in poverty and inadequate social conditions.⁶⁴⁶

As one of the most significant sections of the Iraqi population, and in the context of general poverty, the Shi'a community was home to a large share of the underclass in the country. Furthermore, even though it has been shown that Saddam's regime was not discriminating specifically on a sectarian basis but was more based on clanic affiliation, most people coming from southern and central regions of Iraq were excluded from the clanic networks at the heart of the Regime.⁶⁴⁷ Even more, most of the population in these regions belonged to the Shi'a community. Thus, most of the poor and dispossessed Iraqi population, excluded by State support networks, especially informal ones, belonged to the Shi'a community. In this community, of course, a group of more affluent people was also present, which nevertheless represented a minority and was concentrated in some areas of the country, such as the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala. Another more extensive group of Shi'as in Iraq comprised the poor and dispossessed class living in the suburbs or Iraqi cities,

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴ Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*.

⁶⁴⁵ *Having [Saddam] crushed the Intifada at a horrendous human cost, killing between 30,000 and 100,000 people [...]*. Baram (1997). *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq*, p. 20. Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 331. Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett (2001). *Iraq Since 1958*, pp. 301 – 303.

⁶⁴⁶ Tripp, (2007). *A History of Iraq*, pp. 252, 253.

⁶⁴⁷ Baram (1997). *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq*.

such as Baghdad, Kufa, or Basra.⁶⁴⁸ Furthermore, these groups were often of recent migration from the countryside, moving to the cities in search of new jobs and better opportunities away from the changing reality of the Iraqi tribal countryside.⁶⁴⁹

Thus, we find a large mass of Iraqis living in the suburbs of the cities, poor and dispossessed, outside the State's welfare network, that shrunk badly during the 90s or was used as a political weapon, away from tribal support networks to which they nevertheless often tried to return, as an answer to the 90s difficult situation.⁶⁵⁰

The historical situation and the state of these groups of the Iraqi population crafted an environment in which the sentence *when the earth will be filled with tyranny and injustice* referred to the Mahdi's return and assumed a new discomforting reality.⁶⁵¹

This description of the 90s reality in Iraq, far from being an assumption from the outside,⁶⁵² matches the description of the situation made by Sadr in his works, where the author highlights how *the people [of Iraq] are going through more tragedies and grievances than any other Muslim people*.⁶⁵³ Furthermore, in its Encyclopedia, Sadr stated that most of

⁶⁴⁸ Nakash, (1994). *The Shi'is of Iraq*, pp. 187 – 205, 205 – 269.

⁶⁴⁹ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, pp. 333, 334. Baram (1997). *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq*, p. 3. [...] *the Qasim regime [1958 - 1963] abolished the 1933 Law Governing the Rights and Duties of Cultivators. This released the peasants from the legal bonds that tied them to their landlords, enabling them to move and settle in the cities.*

⁶⁵⁰ *The decline of the urban educated classes was accentuated when the regime started to introduce tribal traditions into the all-Iraqi legal system. Occasionally even political-strategic thinking was defined as tribal. By 1995 the village conquered the city.* Baram (1997). *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq*, p. 21. In general, in Iraqi society in the 90s, there was a return to tribal values and networks (even though these values were appropriated and modified by the Baath, the tribes again gained strong symbolic and practical importance). Thus, also dispossessed citizens in Baghdad's suburbs went back to their tribal networks to find help. Tripp, (2007). *A History of Iraq*, p. 253. Baram also provides a definition of tribe, which might help understand this social entity in the Iraqi context. *'Tribe' may be used loosely of a ... group in which kinship [or a myth thereof] is the dominant idiom of organization, and whose members consider themselves culturally distinct... Tribes are usually politically unified... They do not usually relate directly with the state, but only through ... intermediate structures.* Baram (1997). *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq*, p 21.

⁶⁵¹ As Wickham argues: *successful ideological outreach requires a resonant message, credible messengers, and effective mechanisms of transmission. What makes a message "resonant," messengers "credible," and mechanisms "effective" is context specific, contingent on the life experiences of the citizens whom a movement has targeted for recruitment as well as on the cultural and institutional environment in which they are embedded. While elements of the local context diminish the mobilizing power of some ideas, they amplify the potency of others.* Wickham (2002). *Mobilizing Islam*, p. 206.

⁶⁵² It is important to highlight that the perception of a difficult situation in the 90s in Iraq is not an external assumption. Neither it is the attempt to objectively define a situation as a *political opportunity*, as conceived by SMT. As we highlighted in the introduction, our theoretical approach is based on the internal perception of social actors of their surrounding reality. In this sense, we have to base our evaluation of a situation on the actors' understanding of it, to better explain their reactions to specific events.

⁶⁵³ *Iraq will become the land that will give birth to quite a few major leaders of the Mahdi [...]* *It is not the preference of Iraq as a whole over others, but that is because the people there are going through more tragedies and grievances than other Muslim peoples.* al-Šadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, Vol. 2, p. 133. *The rule of the infidel, even if the ruler is apparently a Muslim, is the rule that followed the period of the caliphate, and we are still living in this period now in most of the Levant. It was based on the foundations drawn from the principles of materialistic European civilization, whether they are capitalist or socialist, or others. Thus, the*

the supporters of the Mahdi after his return would be descendants from the Tribes of al-Ammara, pointing to a direct invitation, to the largest group of his supporters, as we shall see, to prepare for the return of the Mahdi and directly connect them with this objective.⁶⁵⁴

Given this situation and how it was described and perceived by Sadr and his supporters, it is no surprise that the idea of the possibility of the Mahdi's return, with all its promises of justice and retribution, would constitute a great hope for the poor and dispossessed Shi'as. Furthermore, this hope would also provide a solid reason to act, take social and political action, and join a social movement promising the Imam's quick return. Hence, we start understanding that by setting the terrible Iraqi reality of the 90s within the sacred Shi'a history and describing the injustices of the 90s as the tyranny that would fill Earth before the return of the Mahdi, Sadr made his ideas on Mahdism a central tool in mobilizing support for the Sadrist Trend. Moreover, as Baqir al-Sadr states in his introduction to the *Encyclopedia, the belief in the Mahdi is, in reality, the belief in the protest against all forms of oppression and tyranny*, stressing in an even more explicit way the mobilizing potential of these ideas.⁶⁵⁵

2.2.1.3 The Conditions for the Mahdi's Return.

Henceforth, in his work on the Mahdi, Sadr tries to convey all the hopes of the oppressed Shi'a community, on which a revanchist discourse and a promise of eschatological fulfillment and justice would easily take hold. In particular, after dealing with problems such as the location of the Imam during the Great Occultation, his extraordinarily long life, his family life, and his interference with the lives of ordinary people, Sadr focuses on the

principles of Islam were completely rejected, and the ruling was based on the foundations of man-made laws. Ibid., p. 332. [...] Such rulers [infidel princes] exploit the weaknesses of the Muslim nation and oppress them. In this sense, autocratic rule is no different from deviant rule based on other than Islam. [...] The first thing with which these rulers oppress the Muslim nation is: by denying it intellectual and political freedom and freedom of opinion and threatening transgressors with death or painful punishments. If Muslims surrendered and kept silent, the infidel rulers will exploit and make lawful their deeds and take control of their resources. Ibid., pp. 348, 349. These brief extracts from the *Encyclopedia* show us how Sadr perceived the situation in Iraq. He highlights the fact that Iraqi people are going through more tragedies than any other. Also, they live under the rule of an infidel prince, who rejects Islam, oppresses the Ummah, denies political freedom, and tries to silence its opponents. Also, al-Simri states that after such intense repression as the one following the 1991 Uprising, supporting again the idea of a difficult situation for the Iraqi people, it was challenging to start a new political project of opposition. Thus, working on hopes such as the return of the Mahdi was central to rebuilding this project. al-Simri (2019). *Dawr al-Marġa'iyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 75.

⁶⁵⁴ Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*. Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 373.

⁶⁵⁵ Sadr (1977). *Bahat hawl al-Mahdī*, p. 8.

behavior that believers should follow during the absence of the Imam.⁶⁵⁶ Furthermore, he also deals with the path to follow to prepare for the return of Imam Mahdi.

As we have started to highlight, in Sadr's ideas, the return of the Mahdi can be accelerated by the believers' actions, as the evil that fills the Earth is their choice. Thus, it also depends on their will to prepare and bring closer the moment the Mahdi will return by fulfilling the conditions God has set for this appearance.

First, Sadr supports the idea that the Mahdi lives among men, disguised and not revealing his true nature. He proposes the thesis of the *invisibility of the title*, where the Mahdi himself is not invisible or living in a hidden location. Still, only his title of awaited savior is not manifest. This theory is also supported by Baqir al-Sadr in his work on the Mahdi.⁶⁵⁷ Henry Corbin states that the Mahdi is not hidden, but men cannot see him anymore, as they abandoned God's path.⁶⁵⁸

From this position, we start to grasp the sense of vicinity between the savior and the community that Sadr's work tries to build. Sadr probably also wants to reconcile Shi'a beliefs and the general community of lay believers and, in particular, the poorest strata of it, which perhaps felt alienated from the aloofness of the traditional clerical establishment, one of the main problems of the Shi'a community in Iraq, according to Sadr.⁶⁵⁹ The presence of the Mahdi also expresses the idea of a leader close to his community who shares with believers and understands their suffering.⁶⁶⁰ Along with constant references to the *imminent return* of the Mahdi, which might occur at any time, this idea contributes to crafting a sense of expectation of an event that will soon happen.⁶⁶¹ This sense of eager expectation contrasts

⁶⁵⁶ al-Ṣadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, vol. 2, p. 77, pp. 133 and followings.

⁶⁵⁷ Thus, al-Mahdi (peace be upon him) is no longer an idea waiting to be materialized nor a prophecy that needs to be substantiated, but a living reality and a person, living among us in flesh and blood, who is sharing our hopes, suffering, sorrows and joys, actually witnessing all the sufferings, sadness and transgression that exist on the surface of the earth, who is affected with all this from near or far, who is waiting for the appropriate moment when he can stretch his hands to every oppressed and needy person and eradicate the tyrants. al-Ṣadr (1977). *Baḥaṭ ḥawl al-Mahdī*, p. 10.

⁶⁵⁸ Corbin, (2015). *L'imam Nascosto*, p. 91.

⁶⁵⁹ Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Taḥaṣṣīṣah (2010). *Muqaddimah lal-Āḍwā' 'alā tawrah al-Ḥusseīn*, p. 12.

⁶⁶⁰ Baqir al-Sadr also supports a similar idea: Thus, we come to realize that this materialization has given a new impetus to the idea [of the Mahdi] and made it a source of strength and generosity [...] individual finds comfort in consolation and relief from the pains that he has to suffer under tyranny and deprivation when he comes to feel that his Imam and leader shares them with him since the Imam is a person and not an idea to be realized in the future. al-Ṣadr (1977). *Baḥaṭ ḥawl al-Mahdī*, p. 11. Muhammad al-Sadr also expresses the fact that the presence of the Leader (the Mahdi living among men) raises the morale of the individuals and strengthens their determination. The morale and the strength of the spirit of the Muslim nation increase when it feels that its leader is present and conscious of its affairs. al-Ṣadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, vol. 2, p. 141.

⁶⁶¹ Also in this case Baqir expresses a similar concept. al-Ṣadr (1977). *Baḥaṭ ḥawl al-Mahdī*, p. 11 [...] the individual who believes in the appearance of the Mahdi (peace be upon him) and that he is expected at all

with the mainstream doctrines on the Mahdi's waiting. As Amir Moezzi has highlighted, these call for a patient and quiet wait for the appearance.⁶⁶²

The sense of the imminent Mahdi return and vicinity, given by this approach, in addition to fuelling believers' hopes, is also the basis for another of Sadr's claims. He claims, as we have started to highlight, that the return of the Mahdi is not only close and can happen at any time but can also be anticipated. This belief even strengthens the millenarist expectations and the promise of eschatological fulfillment present in Sadrist's discourse. Moreover, by making the possibility of drawing near the Mahdi's return dependent on certain conditions, as we shall see, Sadr transforms the invitation to implement these conditions into a powerful call to action.

The theory of the possibility of accelerating the Mahdi's return is not Sadr's original invention, but it comes out of a context where this idea was already circulating. Moreover, in the history of Shi'ism, as we have seen, there are traces of other currents believing in a close return of the Imam or claiming that he had actually come back. For instance, in contemporary times, influential Shi'a scholars such as Musa al-Sadr and the Muslim intellectual Ali Šarī'atī (Shariati) both claimed the possibility of drawing near the return of the Mahdi. Musa al-Sadr, in a lesson on the Mahdi, states that: *[...] to prepare or to wait does not mean to delay. To wait means to organize and prepare. If you say, I am waiting for you at two o'clock so that we can travel, and then you come at two o'clock, and you find me still in my bed, and I want to bathe myself and put my clothes on, I was not waiting for you... I was sleeping. Waiting for you means being ready and standing, and as soon as you come, we will start our journey.*⁶⁶³ Thus, Musa calls for constant preparation for the Mahdi's imminent return. Shariati also supports similar positions. According to him, the fight against evil can not wait for the return of the Mahdi, as a quietist approach to Mahdism would suggest, but it must be started now to accelerate his return.⁶⁶⁴ For instance, the work of al-

times, suddenly, must dissociate himself from sins and limit his behaviour to obedience to God Almighty, to be on the required level when he will appear. As appearance is always possible, the individual must always have the required level. [...] There is a strong interest in making the Muslim individual wait for the appearance of the Mahdi (peace be upon him) at all times, and be psychologically prepared to receive this great news. al-Šadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, vol. 2, p. 135. *We have said that waiting carries in itself the meaning of anticipating the appearance at any time and every day.* (Ibid., p. 137)

If this call is the call of truth, on its promised day, this global psychological atmosphere will have a great impact on supporting the just implementation that day. (Ibid., p. 137) In these passages, Sadr tells the reader that the psychological atmosphere of waiting for the Mahdi will be central in preparing for his return.

⁶⁶² Moezzi (1998). *Eschatology* iii.

⁶⁶³ al-Šadr, Mūsā. *Al-Mahdī*. (<http://www.imamsadr.net/News/news.php?NewsID=6621>) (Retrieved 01/10/22).

⁶⁶⁴ Mervin and Mouline (2017). *Islam politiques*, p. 147. *En Iran, l'intellectuel Ali Shariati défend un chiisme contestataire, activiste, le « chiisme rouge », celui d'Ali, contre un chiisme institutionnalisé, quietiste, conservé*

Khu'i on the Mahdi, apart from being much smaller in size compared to Sadr's work, is strictly a desk study and does not mention any millenarian expectation for the return of the Mahdi nor the possibility of accelerating it with action. Instead, the Mahdi's return is postponed to a far and undefined moment in the future, *at the end of time*.⁶⁶⁵ This point of view provides a perfect example of a more quietist approach to Mahdism.⁶⁶⁶

Among the supporters of an accelerationist approach to Mahdism, we also find Ayatollah Khomeini. In their study on Mahdism, Aarab and Golkar argue that *Khomeini's theory also reconceptualized Mahdism, reversing centuries of clerical quietism during the Major Occultation. Rather than silently waiting for the 12th Imam's return, Khomeini argued, the 12th Imam was waiting for Shi'a Muslims to prepare the ground for his arrival*.⁶⁶⁷

Probably drawing on these ideas close to those of Shariati, Musa, and Khomeini, Sadr calls for Muslims *to prepare the condition of appearing on the promised day*.⁶⁶⁸ Equally, he calls *to contribute to creating the conditions of appearance*.⁶⁶⁹ Stating that the appearance

par les clercs et protégé par le pouvoir, le « chiisme noir », celui des Safavides. Selon lui, en outre, la lutte contre le mal ne souffre pas d'attendre la réapparition du Mahdi, mais il faut l'entamer ici et maintenant afin de hâter son retour. Il actualise, d'une certaine manière, les figures sacrées du chiisme et les héros de Karbala en leur prêtant des qualités et des desseins révolutionnaires. Le temps et l'espace sont gommés, abolis, car « chaque portion de terre est Karbala et chaque jour est Achoura ». Au Liban, Musa Sadr met ces idées en pratique. D'une part, lorsqu'il lance son « mouvement des déshérités », en 1974, il recourt aux commémorations de Achoura pour mobiliser les chiites autour de sa cause : il suit le calendrier des célébrations pour organiser des manifestations et reprend, en les réinterprétant, les symboles de la bataille de Karbala, incitant ses partisans à ne plus pleurer Husayn, porteur d'un message de justice contre toute forme d'oppression, mais à le prendre pour modèle pour défendre leur cause, tant à l'intérieur du Liban, contre les nantis qui les exploitent, qu'à l'extérieur, contre Israël.

⁶⁶⁵ (Know) that all Muslims are in agreement that the Mahdi will emerge at the end of time. al-Ḥū'ī, Abū al-Qāsim (2008). *Al-Imām al-Qā'im al-Muntazār*. (<https://www.al-khoei.us/edara/index.php?id=23>).

⁶⁶⁶ The return of the Imam, according to most traditions, has to be waited for patiently. Moezzi (1998). *Eschatology iii*. Furthermore, Saramifar, in his work on Messianism in Iran, states that: *hope can lead to paralysis. One can be so caught up in one's hope that one does nothing to prepare for its fulfilment*. Saramifar, Younes (2021). *Hope, Messiah and troubles of messianic futures in Iran: exploring martyrdom and politics of hope amongst the Iranian revolutionary youth*. British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, p. 5. This description would fit what Sadr called *the silent Hawza*, which supports the idea that the Mahdi must have waited patiently and without any form of resistance and violence.

⁶⁶⁷ Golkar, Saeid and Aarabi, Kasra (2022). *Iran's Revolutionary Guard and the Rising Cult of Mahdism: Missiles and Militias for the Apocalypse*. Middle East Institute. (<https://www.mei.edu/publications/irans-revolutionary-guard-and-rising-cult-mahdism-missiles-and-militias-apocalypse>.) *Imam Khomeini changed Intizar Faraj into a discourse which led to the resistance and protests, hence, it is evident [for us] that active participation and an agentive approach are embedded in Shia messianism*. Saramifar, (2021). *Hope, Messiah and troubles of messianic futures in Iran*, p. 6.

⁶⁶⁸ al-Ṣadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, vol. 2, p. 147. The commonalities between the thought of Muhammad al-Sadr and Ali Shariati are also highlighted by the work of al-Ḥaraz, 'Abd al-Laṭīf (2011). *Al-Ḥussain Ṭāqah al-Amal: Dirāsah Muqāranah la-qa ḍiyyah Karbalā' Bayn Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr wa 'Alī Ṣarī'atī* (Hussain the Power of Hope: A compared Study on the Question of Karbala between Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr and Ali Shariati). Dār al-Maḥḡah al-Bayḍā'.

⁶⁶⁹ al-Ṣadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, vol. 2, p. 65.

condition can be prepared, Sadr implies that these are not entirely out of men's control, and thus, they are responsible for bringing forth the time of the Imam's rise. Accordingly, Sadr states that *we know that his rise (peace be upon him) against his enemies can only happen with severe work and genuine effort on both the public and private levels. [...] Each individual has full responsibility for this, and the responsibility is not limited to the leader [the Mahdi].*⁶⁷⁰ Hence, we see how Sadr calls Muslims again to act to make the Mahdi's return happen and reminds them that it is everyone's responsibility to work for it. Sadr also explains in which directions these efforts have to be: *what raises the degree of sincerity of the Muslim nation and creates the condition for appearance is fighting against injustice.*⁶⁷¹ All these efforts and waiting in such a way, according to Sadr, can help anticipate the arrival of the Mahdi: *We have said that waiting means anticipating the appearance and the coming of the promised day at any time and every day.*⁶⁷²

Henceforth, Sadr explains the conditions that must be met to transform the wait for the Imam into an acceleration of his return.⁶⁷³ Sadr highlights fighting against injustice as one of the conditions of appearance. The injustice in the Ummah (the Islamic community) is partly men's fault due to their abandonment of God's straight path. Nevertheless, this injustice is also God's test for the Muslim community. Through this test, the community develops a sense of Islamic responsibility and consciousness, bringing about the Islamisation of society.

Furthermore, Sadr says that only a conscious Ummah can bring forth the day of appearance.⁶⁷⁴ Therefore, even though the Mahdi suffers from seeing his community undergo difficult circumstances, he can not reveal himself before the conditions are met. He must let the Ummah fight against injustice and create the conditions for the appearance through this fight.⁶⁷⁵

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 65.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., p. 69.

⁶⁷² Ibid., p. 71.

⁶⁷³ Ibid. pp. 66, 68. Baqir al-Sadr as well stresses the importance of the conditions for the return of the Mahdi. al-Ṣadr (1977). *Baḥaṭ ḥawl al-Mahdī*, p. 74.

⁶⁷⁴ *And that conscious nation is the one that can step forward in front of Imam Al-Mahdi (peace be upon him) and establish the awaited justice on the promised day.* al-Ṣadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, vol. 2, p. 67.

⁶⁷⁵ *If the Muslim nation's passage through conditions of injustice and arbitrariness is necessary to fulfill the condition of the promised day, such conditions can not be modified. Even if the Mahdi (peace be upon him) feels sorry for the passage of his people through such harsh conditions, he can not help them or change them before the day of his appearance.* Ibid. p. 68.

Islamic responsibility and awareness, according to Sadr, are the knowledge of Islam and the consciousness of its rituals and obligations. It also consists of the belief in the Mahdi and his return, the readiness to sacrifice oneself for the Imam and help him fight against evil once he is returned.⁶⁷⁶ Sadr states that *once the day the appearance of the Mahdi (peace be upon him) is considered the central pillar of everyone's existence, his appearance draws near.*⁶⁷⁷ This Islamic responsibility must be spread through reforms on the public and personal levels.⁶⁷⁸ The primary tool to extend these reforms, implementing responsibility and awareness, is education. Sadr states that *humanity had to be educated gradually until it reached the appropriate level to understand the complete justice God Almighty wants to apply on the promised day.*⁶⁷⁹ According to Sadr, education is so central to creating the conditions for the Mahdi's return that *to ensure the success of the application on the promised day, humanity needed to go through certain conditions that would guarantee it to be educated on the exact form of the complete thesis represented by Islam.*

Moreover, educating the Islamic nation is also particularly important as the *Islamic cultural atmosphere significantly impacts Muslims' understanding of the correct and complete thesis, their readiness to defend it, and their success in resisting deviance.*⁶⁸⁰ In his

⁶⁷⁶ *Among the most important conditions of the promised day is that the Muslim nation, at the time of its appearance, is on a high level of a sense of Islamic responsibility and is ready to sacrifice in the way of God Almighty. Or at least that there should be a sufficient number of people ready to be soldiers at the order of the Mahdi (peace be upon him) against infidelity and deviation and to build a bright Islamic tomorrow. The army composed of such people will be a group of conscious pioneers that fills the earth with equity and justice as it was filled with oppression and tyranny under the leadership of the Mahdi (peace be upon him).* Ibid., p. 66. *Among the required Islamic duties during the Occultation is the recognition of the Mahdi, peace be upon him, as the imam to whom everyone owes obedience.* Ibid., p. 67.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 93.

⁶⁷⁸ *His [the Mahdi's] recommendation is for public reform, which is greater and more important than personal reform, by which the condition of reappearance is fulfilled, and puts the Muslim nation on the level of responsibility that is required to meet Imam Mahdi, peace be upon him, and bear the responsibilities of his reappearance.*

This general reform, in fact, expresses the necessity [...] of fulfilling the covenant made upon them, in obeying the orders and prohibitions of Islam and complying with and following the leaders of Islam. [...] It consists of the actions to spread and implement Islam, and the common effort against all kinds of injustice and tyranny. Ibid., p. 72.

As for the subjective internal factor, it is the feeling of responsibility towards the complete just thesis [Islam as the final goal of humanity].

He [the Mahdi] commands for personal reform of the soul, which is the cornerstone for reforming society, [...]. Without that, the individual would lose his true faith, and deviate sharply, thereby losing his worldly life and the afterlife. Ibid., p. 73.

Henry Corbin also highlighted the importance of the personal dimension of the Imam's return. He states that when the Mahdi returns, believers will understand the mission and the reality of the Imam within themselves. This level of interpretation is strongly connected to a mystical interpretation of Mahdism, which sees the appearance of the Mahdi as the final step of a path of personal spiritual elevation. Corbin, (2015). *L'imam Nascosto*, p. 92.

⁶⁷⁹ al-Šadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, vol. 2, p. 66.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 417.

well-known study on the Mahdi, Henry Corbin states that the Imam will not return until Muslims do not perfectly know the ties on his sandals.⁶⁸¹ Corbin's evocative image shows us the importance of knowledge and education about Islam and the Mahdi in Mahdist doctrines. Thus, within a wrong or uneducated cultural atmosphere, differing from an Islamic one, Muslims can not correctly understand Islam's complete and correct thesis and prepare for the Mahdi's return.

For this reason, Sadr, beyond insisting on education to prepare the Ummah for the Mahdi's appearance, also insists on creating the conditions for this education. Sadr is preoccupied with other cultural influences, especially those from Western colonialism, that could hinder the diffusion of Islamic education and, thus, the creation of the appearance conditions. He states that [...] *according to what we know of modern history, colonialism first managed to dominate the minds and the culture of a large number of the people of this country [Iraq]. In the end, this resulted in the colonial domination expressed by the Western form of government in the lands of Islam and by the diffusion of Western methods in every aspect of culture.*⁶⁸²

*Explicit materialistic currents such as Communism and existentialism have attracted millions of Muslims. Under these circumstances, maintaining faith is a strenuous activity that requires a conscious effort.*⁶⁸³

This preoccupation is reflected in Sadr's interest in exerting a cultural influence before exercising political power. As Lisa Blaydes states, *Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr appeared to be working to create a mass cultural movement, leaving politics to the Ba 'th Party.*⁶⁸⁴ As we have seen in the introduction, according to Sadr, if the "qualified jurist" can not take power and lead the state, then he has to first Islamize society by raising awareness in society about Islam and then, the conditions for his ascent to power will be met. This is a perfect description of what Sadr did during the 1990s; he tried to spread knowledge of Islam and Islamize Iraqi society, conquer it with his alternative values, and build the right situation for the creation of an Islamic state guided by clerics.

To create these conditions, Sadr states there is a need for a *popular base* of Mahdi's supporters, who are ready to sacrifice for him.⁶⁸⁵ He affirms that *It may be said that a fourth*

⁶⁸¹ Corbin, (2015). *L'imam Nascosto*, pp. 91, 92.

⁶⁸² al-Ṣadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, vol. 2, 347.

⁶⁸³ Ibid., 352.

⁶⁸⁴ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 331.

⁶⁸⁵ *All of these [conditions], are in order to put together a group of people with strong faith, who pledge themselves for the sake of their Lord and their faith in any case. Without this level of faith, no just global*

*condition is required to implement the complete, correct thesis on the promised day. This condition is the existence of a sufficient popular base with an adequate level of awareness and ready to sacrifice as a vanguard of the return of the Mahdi.*⁶⁸⁶

Sadr theorizes that this popular base will be a vanguard for the Mahdi's fight against evil, and they will help the Imam succeed in his duty to bring Earth equity and justice.⁶⁸⁷ The idea of the need and the existence of Imam's popular support is also proposed by Baqir al-Sadr in his work on the Mahdi.⁶⁸⁸

The idea of the need for a popular basis to support the Mahdi is very interesting. It recalls the need for a social movement to support a policy of cultural hegemony, which looks close to Sadr's discourse and actions in the 1990s.

At the same time, Sadr harshly criticizes those who do not believe that the Mahdi's return can be anticipated. Among Muslims, according to Sadr, some consider the belief in the Mahdi *as a reason for laziness, avoiding reform and abandoning social work, and not opposing injustice and oppression, waiting for it on the promised day*. However, Sadr affirms that those supporting this thesis chose *inaction first and prioritized their private interests over public ones*. Furthermore, they also *believe that Islamic action against injustice and oppressors is not practical in any way*.⁶⁸⁹ These critiques are the first signs of Sadr's attacks against other clerics, not politically active enough – the silent hawza – in his opinion, to fight for the Muslim community and the return of the Mahdi. We shall see later how these critiques strengthened in later expressions of Sadr's thought, such as his Sermons.

All these conditions seem to define a path that must be followed to accelerate the Mahdi's return and seem to be close to Henry Corbin's analysis that the return of the Mahdi is something that believers build with everyday actions and not something that will happen suddenly and independently from humans' actions.⁶⁹⁰ This theory also resonates with the

governance will be possible, under any circumstances. (p. 79 notes). In the *History of the Minor Occultation*, Sadr, while accounting the history of Imam Askari, says that one of the Imam's problems was to be cut off from his popular base, as the Abbasids planned to cripple his political power. Thus, we can see how Sadr find central the contact between the Imam and his popular base and wants to claim this role for himself. al-Šadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, vol. 1, p. 177.

⁶⁸⁶ al-Šadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, vol. 2, p. 421.

⁶⁸⁷ *As for the application of the thesis, it requires a more significant number of suitable popular bases to be useful examples of the application of the complete just thesis in the world when it begins to spread on the day of the return.* al-Šadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, vol. 2, p. 367. (pp. 89-91 notes). *If the Mahdi has a capable leader and enough supporters and loyalists and a popular base to spread his call, there is a sufficient possibility for his call to succeed.* Ibid., p. 371.

⁶⁸⁸ al-Šadr (1977). *Bahat̄ ḥawl al-Mahdī*, p. 51.

⁶⁸⁹ al-Šadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, vol. 2, p. 370.

⁶⁹⁰ Corbin, (2015). *L'imam Nascosto*, p. 71.

idea that it can happen every day and at any time, and it is not something far away but close to the believer's everyday life. Furthermore, the preoccupation and emphasis Sadr put on fighting injustice as a condition of the appearance shows his militant conception of Mahdism.

Many of Sadr's ideas are similar to those of other scholars. Thus, these ideas come from an environment of thinkers focusing on Mahdism. Sadr is probably one of the most successful in implementing these ideas and bringing large groups together to mobilize following these Mahdist beliefs.

As we could see in the introduction, the Islamization of society for Sadr is a precondition, highlighting his bottom-up approach, to the formation of an Islamic government led by the "qualified jurist." Nevertheless, this government is also a transitory stage to the real goal, creating the conditions for the return of the Mahdi.⁶⁹¹ In this point, and also in the method to reach the construction of an Islamic state, we can see the difference between Sadr and other Shi'a political thinkers of the time, such as Khomeini and his theory of the *Government of the Jurists*.⁶⁹²

The references to a leader, which are nevertheless abundant in the book, all point to the Mahdi.⁶⁹³ These continuous references perhaps indicate Sadr's idea that the only true leader of the community is the Mahdi, and the believers should only work to hasten his return, seeing the "qualified jurist" only as a transitory leader. This position implicitly expressed by Sadr regarding the disputes of authority within the Shi'a community regarding who should lead the believers during the Imam's absence highlights the political nature of his work on the Mahdi. We also understand how this book, among other things, is tied to

⁶⁹¹ As Sabrina Mervin has highlighted: *Les groupes et les milices chiïtes qui se mettent en place en Irak après l'invasion américaine en 2003 se réfèrent, pour bon nombre d'entre elles, à Muhammad al-Sadr, le marja' assassiné. Celui-ci a légué aux chiïtes « déshérités » un discours nouveau: il ne s'agit plus de constituer un mouvement islamique de plus, mais de préparer la réapparition du Mahdi. L'espoir n'est donc plus dans un gouvernement islamique mais dans le règne de l'imam attendu précédant le royaume de Dieu. Son ascendant sur ses adeptes était tel que des rumeurs circulaient, sous-entendant qu'il était peut-être lui-même le Mahdi.* Mervin and Mouline (2017). *Islam politiques*, p. 149. Sadr, in his sermons, as we shall see later, denies being the Mahdi: *The other point that I would like to discuss is that there is a claim that I am Imam Mahdi. And I absolve myself from this false claim, in front of God Almighty. And everyone who claims such a thing is a liar and accursed, and I am innocent of it, and God, glory be to Him, knows it.* al-Şadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, p. 618. Corbin also affirms that Shi'ism orthodoxy has always rejected those who claimed to be the Mahdi. Corbin, (2015). *L'imam Nascosto*, p. 65.

⁶⁹² Khomeini, Ruhollah (2017). *Velayat-e Faqeeh. Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurists*. Scotts Valley (California): CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

⁶⁹³ *Among the required Islamic duties during the Occultation is the recognition of the Mahdi, peace be upon him, as an imam to whom is owned obedience as the actual leader of the nation, even if his work is not clearly visible, and his personality is not known.* al-Şadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, vol. 2, p. 344.

solving the problems of succession and power within the Shi'a community, as the debates on Mahdism were first conceived at the beginning of Islamic history.

This focus on millenarian expectations and hopes probably helps explain Sadr's ascendant on lower-class Shi'a in Iraq, to whom a perspective of a different and better future in contrast with their difficult present situation would have probably seemed attractive. The construction, also with specific stress on education, of an attempt at hegemonic discourse, proposing an alternative to the existing system, results in one of the main characteristics of the Sadrist discourse analyzed and perfectly aligns with Asef Bayat's analysis of social movements' activities.⁶⁹⁴

Even though his work on the Mahdi presents many other topics, we focused mainly on the hopes raised and the conditions Sadr described to fulfill these hopes. According to our understanding, these topics are central to analyzing the Sadrist discourse and the growth of the social movement supporting this discourse. As Sadr states in his Encyclopedia: [...] *religion was and still is the basis of revolutions, oppositions, and demands for establishing truth and justice throughout history and the greatest agitator of human emotions*, perfectly explaining the mobilization potential he saw in his beliefs.⁶⁹⁵

2.2.2 The Lights on the Revolution of Hussain.

Another of the main topics of political Shi'ism used to raise the community's awareness and anger for centuries of oppression is the story of the Martyrdom of Imam Hussain, which we quoted among the events the Mahdi will avenge at his return. This story, even more than Ali's dispossession of the caliphate, the battle of Şiffin (Siffin) against his rival Mu'āwiyah (Mu'awiyah), or his assassination, marks the beginning of the history of oppression that the Shi'a community has narrated about itself for centuries. This Martyrdom of Imam Hussain during the battle of Karbala in 680 is one of the founding events of Shi'ism, along with the belief in the Mahdi.⁶⁹⁶ Hamid Dabashi, in his study on the history of Shi'ism, defines the death of Hussain as the central event for the formation of Shi'ism. *The revolt of Hossein ibn Ali against Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah and his martyrdom in the Battle of Karbala is*

⁶⁹⁴ Bayat (2007), *Making Islam Democratic*, pp. 20, 21.

⁶⁹⁵ al-Şadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, vol. 2, p. 370.

⁶⁹⁶ Al-Ta'i highlights the importance of remembering Imam Hussain's sacrifice as a way of remembering sacred political authorities, including the Mahdi, and supporting political mobilization through their examples. al-Ṭā'i (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Şādiq al-Şadr*, pp. 442 – 445.

*the very model of unsuccessful insurrection against tyranny at the heart of Shi'ism—glorious as it takes place, even more so if it does not succeed, for from its ashes the fire of future revolts will rise. [...] Shi'ism is thus, in effect, an unending metaphysics of revolt against tyranny, with Imam Hossein and Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah as the archetypal representations of this cosmic battle. It is for that reason that Imam Hossein represents the ideal type: a revolutionary hero who revolts against zulm [oppression].*⁶⁹⁷ During the battle, the Umayyads' overwhelming forces cut access to the Euphrates to Hussain and his followers and engaged them in battle. Hussain was trying to reach Kufa, where his supporters were ready to start a revolt to put him at the head of the Ummah, restoring the rule of the prophet's family. The Umayyad's governor of Kufa, 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād, who became one of the most hated figures of Islamic history in Shi'a accounts, was sent to stop him.⁶⁹⁸ A battle followed and was marked by the tragic deaths of almost all of Imam Hussain's family members traveling with him and the final martyrdom of the Imam himself. This dramatic episode has had such an impact on the Shi'a collective imagination that every year is remembered, and pilgrims travel to the site of the battle and the Imam's grave, Karbala.

The story of Imam Hussain is used to incite discontent and support rebellion. For instance, Cook states that *Hezbollah has routinely utilized tropes that are traditionally Shiite (for example, the revered martyr Husayn is frequently utilized by Hezbollah as a revolutionary model to be emulated)*. He also explains that *Khomeini skillfully used messianic passions to mobilize ordinary Iranians against the Shah. He framed the revolution, for example, as a struggle against the satanic forces of Yazid (the Shah) by the righteous forces of al-Husayn (the Iranian revolutionaries). He thus recreated in the minds of many the Battle of Karbala as it should have been (with the righteous side winning this time) at the end of the world - a messianic trope from the classical materials.*⁶⁹⁹

From these examples, we understand how, by working on Hussain's martyrdom, Sadr recurs to a widely known topic of Shi'a history and tries to set the example of the Imam to

⁶⁹⁷ Dabashi (2011). *Shi'ism: a religion of protest*, pp. 82, 83.

⁶⁹⁸ Al-Ta'i affirms that Sadr drew a parallel between the killer of Imam Hussain and Saddam's regime, to exemplify the personification of evil. al-Tā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 450. As Dabashi has explained: *Yazid, the Umayyad caliph who demanded Hossein's obedience or death, has emerged as the absolute personification of evil and injustice in the Shi'i historical memory*. Dabashi (2011). *Shi'ism: a religion of protest*, p. 83.

⁶⁹⁹ Cook, David (2011). *Messianism in the Shiite Crescent*. Hudson Institute. (<https://www.hudson.org/research/7906-messianism-in-the-shiite-crescent>).

be emulated and also to be compared with his actions, which, of course, he deems worthy of this archetype.⁷⁰⁰

We have already quoted Mervin's work about using Mahdism and Karbala's model to mobilize Shi'a for a cause. Ali Shariati tried to do so by actualizing the heroes of Shi'is, such as the Mahdi and Imam Hussain, and making revolutionaries out of them. Musa al-Sadr made a similar attempt in his movement for the dispossessed.⁷⁰¹

Hence, Sadr's decision to write a work on this topic is significant and follows the example of the efforts made by these other scholars. The book was first published in 1997 and, more than commenting on the events of Karbala, which are well known to every Shi'i, focuses on the meaning of Hussain's martyrdom.

Sadr supports the idea that Hussain was trying to carry out a revolution with his actions. According to Sadr, this revolution is an attempt to reform the Ummah: *The Revolution of Al-Hussein (peace be upon him): It is a request for reform or an attempt to reform the Muslim nation.*⁷⁰² This society reform consists of setting an example for Muslims of the faithful and upright religion and establishing Islamic ruling and rituals. All this is possible only through sacrifice and redemption.⁷⁰³ The Prophet foretold that Imam Hussain's martyrdom would be the sacrifice and redemption to guide the Ummah through this reform. *His grandfather [of Imam Hussain] said to him in a dream: "O my son: you must testify with your martyrdom, and you will reach a degree of faith and truth that is only attainable through martyrdom."*

Moreover, according to Sadr, the Imam gave the best example of this sacrifice: *He gave the most excellent example of the enormous sacrifice. It was the best example of illuminating the generations on their way to the Day of Resurrection.*⁷⁰⁴ The idea that Hussain's example would guide believers to the Day of Resurrection, which is the day of the Mahdi's return, explains that this revolution and reform parallels what is needed to prepare for the Mahdi's return. Hussain shows the meaning of Islamic responsibility, which is made of knowledge of Islam and readiness to sacrifice.

⁷⁰⁰ As we shall see later on in the analysis of the work, there are many parallelisms to be drawn between Sadr's actions and discourse and the description that he makes of Imam Hussain's ideas.

⁷⁰¹ Mervin and Mouline (2017). *Islam politiques*, p. 147.

⁷⁰² al-Sadr (2010). *Āḡwā' 'alā ṭawrah al-Hussein*, p. 122.

⁷⁰³ [The Revolution of Hussain means] Giving an example of the true and upright religion which deserves this great amount of sacrifice and redemption for the sake of God and to establish Islamic rulings and religious rituals. Ibid., p. 134.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 135.

Even more, Sadr states that when he started his revolution, Hussain knew he would face the Umayyads and lose. Nevertheless, winning was not his goal. Therefore, he did not aim at military victory or exercising power, as his goal was another, giving an example of Islamic responsibility to follow. *If Imam al-Husayn (peace be upon him) had aimed for immediate military victory, the end of Umayyads' rule, or the exercise of power in society, he would have failed in his mission, considering what happened at Karbala, but these were not his goals.*⁷⁰⁵ The idea of not aiming at exercising political power immediately and not looking for a military victory resounds quite closely with the concept of a social movement that we have used to understand the Sadrist movement: trying first to win over society and only, in a second moment, to gain political power.

Furthermore, even the idea of sacrificing oneself to give an example might not have been so far from Sadr's mind. He knew he would be walking a dangerous path by proposing a renewal within the Shi'a community and trying to spread his ideas about millenarian hopes and justice for the oppressed. In this course, martyrdom was a possibility that could not be ignored, and he did not, as we shall see from the analysis of Sadr's sermons.

Another central point stressed by Sadr in his work on Imam Hussain's revolution was his refusal of *taqiyyah* (dissimulation of one's faith).

*In other words, following taqiyya is permitted but not obligatory. Hence, it can be said that Imam Hussein (peace be upon him) was given a choice at that time between practicing taqiyya and not, and he chose not to. Therefore, as long as he was given a choice, he chose the best side in his view, which is the best in this world and the best in the afterlife, which is his attainment of martyrdom after his revolution against deviation, injustice, and misguidance.*⁷⁰⁶

Thus, according to Sadr, *taqiyyah* for Hussain is permitted but not an obligation. He could choose the best path for him. Furthermore, the Imam chose, as in some instances, when the core of Islam is in danger, taking action becomes more important than self-preservation. *It depends [following taqiyya] upon an important social goal, such as preserving the core of Islam. As we will know, the preservation of Islam at that time depended on sacrifice, not on piety.*⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 126.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 105.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 106.

This bold approach of the Imam would suggest a militant approach to Islam mirrored by Sadr's choices. In explaining Hussain's choice, we can also read a veiled critique of quietist scholars. They chose *taqiyyah* even when, at least according to Sadr, the core of Islam was in danger. In such cases, *the preservation of Islam at that time depended on sacrifice, not on piety*, as Sadr has stated.⁷⁰⁸ The reading of Imam's Hussain revolution thus closely recalls some of Sadr's positions, especially on activism and opposition to quietism.

Finally, Sadr calls on his followers not to give in to the temptation of considering Karbala a humiliation, as it was a military defeat. He already declared that military victory was not the objective of the Imam's actions. Furthermore, he states there is no humiliation in being materially weak but strong in faith, as the weak will inherit Earth, as explained in Qur'an 28:5, quoted at the beginning of the *Encyclopedia of the Mahdi*. Following Imam Hussain's example, this statement would be a powerful call to the oppressed to act and try to change their status, even with sacrifice.

"And remember when you were few, deemed weak in the land, fearing lest people might carry you off by force, but He sheltered you and strengthened you with His aid and gave you of the good things that you may give thanks." This expresses the idea that there is no humiliation in weakness in number, and God will protect the faithful.⁷⁰⁹

Conversely, with his sacrifice and faith, Hussain is depicted in Shi'a tradition as the chivalry, honor, and heroism model.⁷¹⁰ Thus, he also represents a model of tribal values, and the ritual commemorating his martyrdom is one of the most heartfelt celebrations in popular Shi'a religiosity, and thus also among the tribes. Hence, the redaction of a book on Imam Hussain and his model is probably again part of Sadr's attempt to approach Iraqi tribes. At the same time, this work is also an attempt to mobilize the Shi'a community, calling on one of the most important events of its history, as we highlighted.

The topic of the martyrdom of Imam Hussain is another central instrument used in Sadr's discourse to mobilize the Shi'a community, along with references to the Mahdi. At the same time, this work on Imam Hussain's martyrdom also contains references to the creation of a sense of Islamic responsibility and Islamisation of society, connecting it with the conditions needed to accelerate the return of the Mahdi. Finally, it also refers to Hussain's

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 120. Qur'an 8:26.

⁷¹⁰ *There was the belief that tribesmen had retained more tribal values such as honour, courage, etc.* Baram (1997). *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq*, p. 5.

courage in the face of defeat and his values, such as honor and chivalry, connecting with ideas of tribal ethos, thus providing topics to raise tribes' consensus for Sadr's project.

2.2.3 The Diffusion of Sadr's Teachings.

By analyzing these works, particularly the *Encyclopedia of the Mahdi*, we understand that spreading Islam in society was a priority for Sadr well before the beginning of the "Faith Campaign." Thus, he has probably also transmitted this idea to his students/agents.

In the context of what was seen as a secularized Iraqi society, which we already highlighted, Sadr fought to spread Islam. The books we examined are, of course, highly theoretical works, several hundred pages long, and were probably not widely read by the general public. Thus, Sadr had to find a way of delivering his ideas to a broader group of followers. Furthermore, we have seen in our analysis of Sadr's work on the Mahdi how central the idea of educating society about Islamic behaviors and beliefs was in that book. Such education would bring awareness of Islam to society and, consequently, the return of the Mahdi. Henceforth, educating society on these ideas was central. Lessons by himself and his representatives were probably efficient. As we highlighted, the network used to spread Sadr's presence and gain followers was also being used to spread his ideas. Other techniques included distributing pamphlets, fatawas, audiocassettes of Sadr's lessons, the *al-Hudà* magazine, and, generally, stories circulating on Sadr's behavior and personality all worked in this direction. The establishment of the Friday prayer in 1997 and the sermons delivered on these occasions were also perfect tools to spread Sadr's ideas.⁷¹¹

According to many of the people interviewed, during the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, religious culture in Iraq was very weak, and most people did not have good religious knowledge, ignoring even the most basic values and rules of Islam. People would drink alcohol, attend marriages with mixed-sex celebrations, go to parties, and the like.⁷¹² To somebody familiar with Sadr's work on the Mahdi, such a situation would have looked like the forsaking of faith and loss of any connection with the divine; these, as we

⁷¹¹ Sadr probably started to spread his ideas even before the establishment of the Friday prayer through propaganda materials, lessons in the Hawza, and through his representative. Still, we have not retrieved this material so far. Also, the sermons are probably a more explicit way of spreading his ideas, with a much higher impact than other tools.

⁷¹² Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024). Interview with N. E., Kufa (31/05/2024). Interview with Sheikh H. S., Baghdad (03/12/2023). Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid J., Najaf (29/11/2023).

highlighted, were the conditions in which the return of the Mahdi would have become imminent. In contrast to the loss of the Islamic path, ideologies such as Pan-Arabism, Nationalism, or Communism were still widespread in the 1980s in Iraq, according to Hajj Ali Chali, one of Sadr's followers in the 1990s.⁷¹³ This distance from religion also came from the fear instilled by the Regime's repression and its campaigns against religious figures and religious activism. During the 1980s, having a beard, going to pray to the mosque, and having religious books at home were all reasons that could lead to the arrest.⁷¹⁴ Religious schools were closed, both in the hawza and all over Iraq.⁷¹⁵ Sadr thus also has to face this obstacle and was seen as the one who could free the Iraqis of this fear and give them back courage and hope.⁷¹⁶ In particular, after the 1991 Intifada, people became interested in religion again, probably coinciding with the "Faith Campaign."⁷¹⁷ This "religious comeback" took place primarily among the youth, according to Sadr's supporters.⁷¹⁸

Sadr and his representatives started spreading religiosity through simple teachings that dealt with everyday problems. He preached against the mixing of sexes, the widespread selling and drinking of alcohol, the playing of songs and music and dancing, the diffusion of Western movies and soap operas dealing with inappropriate and explicit themes, and the way of dressing of both men and women, also considered an influence from Western culture and cultural imperialism. The attacks and criticism of the West, mainly embodied by the US, were ideally in line with the Regime's rhetoric after the second Gulf War and served quite well its interests. Sadr started explaining and preaching the fact that these were all unacceptable behaviors in Islam. Sadr also denounced prostitution and sexual behaviors he deemed unIslamic.⁷¹⁹ He also denounced certain restaurants and food products for not using halal ingredients or processing. Sheikh H. recalls an ice cream shop in Madina Saddam, the Ḥāḡḡ Laṭīf shop, that used non-halal products. He went there asking for halal ice cream and got thrown out of the shop, insulted as "Sadr's follower." A few months later, the shop had to exhibit a board saying "halal products" to attract customers in the Madina. Sadr also

⁷¹³ Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

⁷¹⁴ Interview with Sayyid H. K., Najaf (03/03/2024). Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024). Interview with A., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

⁷¹⁵ Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024).

⁷¹⁶ Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024). Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024). Interview with Hajj Q. Qasem al-Suwheili by phone (29/04/2024). Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁷¹⁷ Ibid.

⁷¹⁸ Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024). Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁷¹⁹ Interview with Sayyid J., Najaf (29/11/2023). Interview with Sheikh H. S., Baghdad (03/12/2023). Interview with A., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

declared that a particular fish that was killed while still in the water, contrary to Sharia precepts, was not to be eaten. Sheikh H. remembers that he did not buy this fish anymore, even though it was the cheapest and his family did not have much money. Sadr also regulates animal slaughter, adapting it to the Sharia.⁷²⁰

More and more people started following Sadr's teachings and his vision of Sharia, and they peer pressured many of their friends to respect the same prohibitions, as Sheikh H. from Madinat al-Sadr or Sheikh K. in Najaf recall.⁷²¹ In this sense, Sadrist preachings assumed a puritanical dimension as defined by Hasan.⁷²²

We already highlighted how lessons took place in houses and mosques, dealing with Islamic law applied to everyday law, the Quran, Islamic morality, *mu'āmalāt* (transactions), *'ibā'dāt* (practices of worship), and Islamic philosophy topics, like the *tawhīd*.

Sadr's focus on Islamically regulating daily aspects of life and simple things was central in his preachings. He was perceived as somebody who was in touch with the everyday life of Iraqis, something that attracted many followers. Many of Sadr's followers relate the story of somebody going to Najaf to choose which marja' to follow. He visited several marjas, asking them the price of tomatoes, but none knew it. Only Sadr knew the tomatoes' price, so that person chose him as a marja'.⁷²³ This story exemplifies the fact that Sadr was somebody who knew about the problems and hardships of ordinary Iraqis. Hajj Ali Chali shared a similar story; he recounted that one of Sadr's representatives once brought religious tax revenues to Sadr's house in Najaf and was invited to stay for a meal. The *wakil* expected to share a rich meal, also because he had brought money. Instead, they all had a very poor meal without meat.⁷²⁴ This story also exemplifies how Sadr was viewed as modest and frugal, living the same reality as his followers who faced economic hardship in 1990s Iraq. He also used a popular language that everybody could understand. He also spoke Iraqi dialects and had a similar mentality and way of doing things to lay Iraqis. Sadr was also capable of translating religious concepts into simple words.⁷²⁵ He was considered a wise, knowledgeable, and charismatic man. However, at the same time, he was simple, and for this, he could easily reach people, in contrast to other clerics who were seen as detached

⁷²⁰ Interview with Sheikh H. , Baghdad (02/12/2023). 'Alī (2000). *Iḡtiyāl Ša'ab*, p. 143.

⁷²¹ Ibid. Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

⁷²² Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 368.

⁷²³ Interview with A. B. J. (23/11/2023). Interview with Sayyid A. Z., Kufa (28 – 30/11/2023). Harling (2007).

⁷²⁴ Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

⁷²⁵ Interview with Doctor A. F., Kufa (11/06/2024). Interview Sayyid H. K., Najaf (03/03/2024). Interview with Sayyid M., Najaf (29/05/2024).

from ordinary people.⁷²⁶ The diffusion of the idea of Sadr as a simple but knowledgeable and pious man was an implicit critique of other clerics who did not do the same.

He was known to be somebody who took his ideas to the streets, through his representatives, and not only. His representatives, whose mission was inspired by the Imam's representatives, in particular Imam Sadiq, according to Sadr, were to connect the hawza and Iraqi society.⁷²⁷ According to Sheikh E. H., Sadr had a social conception of religiosity, was involved in politics, rejected *taqiyyah*, giving an image that recalled that of Imam Hussein,⁷²⁸ who also rejected this concept, and was critical of quietist clerics, quoting Imam Hussein as an example, as seen in the previous section. In contrast, al-Khu'i and Sistani had an individual conception of religiosity and were more quietists. His interest in everyday Iraqis and connection with them mirrored this social conception of religion.⁷²⁹ To build this social religiosity, Sadr needed to reform the structure of the hawza and use it to spread his message and vision. He wanted to Islamize society from below and not as teaching from above, to reform both society and the hawza. To do so, he had to change the idea of the hawza and the marja', as we shall see in the next section of the chapter.⁷³⁰

In line with this idea of reforming the hawza, Sadr declared himself the most knowledgeable of all maraja' and also announced himself as the *Wali al-'Aam* in 1996, a representative of the Hidden Imam who had powers as representative of the Imam in political matters and not just religious. Usually, marajas would assume only the *wilayat khassa* and power over religious issues. Since Sadr wanted to reform the hawza to involve it more in Iraqi society and politics, denouncing society's corruption, he claimed the title of *Wali al-Amr* to fulfill this role as the hawza leader.⁷³¹

Sadr, in his campaign to reintroduce religion in Iraq, also decided to give a new shape to the Iraqi Islamic movement. In this sense, he wanted to create a movement that involved all of society, not a secret revolutionary organization. He wanted to Islamize society, not to create an Islamic state with a coup, but to bring it forth by the inevitable majority of people in Iraq adopting his ideas.⁷³² According to Sheikh K., as we have already seen, Sadr chose

⁷²⁶ Interview with Sheikh S., Najaf (03/03/2024).

⁷²⁷ Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/02/2024).

⁷²⁸ Interview with M. K., Najaf (31/05 – 01/06/2024).

⁷²⁹ Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024). Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

⁷³⁰ Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024). Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with N. E., Kufa (31/05/2024).

⁷³¹ Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024). Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024).

⁷³² Interview with Sheikh S., Najaf (03/03/2024).

this strategy of creating a mass movement instead of a secret revolutionary movement, as he thought that this would have given fewer possibilities and reasons to the Regime to kill the members of such movement.⁷³³ The idea of a movement that would not directly try to conquer political power with a coup or a revolution but tried first to permeate society is already present in Sadr's work on Mahdism and the Revolution of Imam Hussein, as we could see, and following, thus, this strategy is both a response to the situation he lived in and sign of coherence with what he had expressed previously in his works.

To form representatives that could spread his ideas, as we have seen, Sadr also taught students; he was very interested in teaching young people as he considered them the most important part of society. Sadr was considered an excellent teacher; he was interested in Sufi and mystic teachings, to the point that many Sadrists thought he was connected with the divine;⁷³⁴ on the other hand, he was interested in contemporary sciences.⁷³⁵ For these two reasons, he studied, on the one hand, Mahdist Doctrines and, on the other, Marxist philosophy and its diffusion in Iraq and the Arab world in the form of Ba'athism, Communism, and Pan-Arabism, which he tried to criticize, along with the fundament of Capitalist thought.⁷³⁶ Sayyid Y. M. stated that Sadr gave his students precise methods and tools to continue their studies independently and understand and interpret reality and society. So that they could also understand the importance of their mission to society.⁷³⁷

From these impressions of many Sadrists, we can see how many stories circulated about Sadr depicting him as a frugal and modest person, charismatic and knowledgeable but also simple, in relation to the divine and with a personality that captivated people. These stories brought a form of adoration for him, with followers kissing his car or rubbing their faces with the soil where he walked.⁷³⁸ All the myths surrounding his person fall into the narrative category around a perfect sayyid, as described by Mauriello. A charismatic model was constructed around him by presenting him as a pious, humble, modest yet courageous,

⁷³³ Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

⁷³⁴ Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (03/03/2024). Interview with Sheikh R. M., Najaf (12/06/2024). Many Sadrists interviewed attribute this to Sadr's almost Saint-like qualities. Sheikh S., for instance, explained how he never met Sadr but, through Sadr's books, he felt a mystical connection with him and that Sadr helped him in moments of need during the 1990s, even in material aspects of his life. He stated that Sadr left him money in his house when this was closed, and nobody could enter. Similarly, he protected him from soldiers looking for him as he avoided military service. All this in the form of an unspecified mystical presence, without ever meeting Sadr. Interview with Sheikh S., Baghdad (08/06/2024). Thus, it is unsurprising that some of Sadr's followers regarded him as the Imam Mahdi.

⁷³⁵ Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

⁷³⁶ Interview with Sheikh S., Najaf (03/03/2024).

⁷³⁷ Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024).

⁷³⁸ Interview with Sayyid M., Najaf (29/05/2024).

selfless example to follow on the path to hasten the Mahdi's return. It is not a case that rumors were spread about Sadr being the Mahdi.⁷³⁹ He always officially denied the rumors but still benefited from their circulation; nevertheless, al-Simri stated that Sadr was hinting that he could be the leader of the Umma while preparing for the Mahdi's return.⁷⁴⁰

All these teachings and ideas about Sadr's project to reform the hawza connect with many of the ideas that Sadr expresses in his books and, especially, his sermons in 1998 and 1999, as we shall see in the next chapter. All these ideas merged into Sadr's reform project, which involved the hawza and Iraqi society.

2.2.4 Muhammad al-Sadr's Project of Reform.

In the previous sections, we analyzed some of the most important works of Muhammad al-Sadr and his teachings. During this analysis, we could notice the presence of some recurrent themes in his works. These are the everpresent millenarism, shown from his effort in writing such a vast work on Mahdism as the *Encyclopedia* and his continuous references to Imam Mahdi; his activist/militant approach to millenarism, mainly expressed in the idea of the necessity of fighting injustice to hasten the Mahdi's return; his strong criticism of quietism; the effort of creating a direct communication between the clerics and the believers; the focus on believers' education to Islam to Islamise society; and the critique of the elitist attitude of hawza members.

⁷³⁹ Harling (2007). *The Sadrism Trend*. Mervin (2004). *Les Autorités religieuses dans le chiisme duodécimain contemporain*. Hasan p. 374 - 375. One of the groups spreading messianic beliefs about Sadr in the 1990s was the *sulukiyyun*. This trend continued even after 2003, with groups such as Soldiers of Heaven, al-Yamani Group, and Ashab al-Qadiya (the owners of the cause) believing that Muqtada was the Mahdi. caused Muqtada to announce his retirement from politics in June 2022, which did not actually happen. Muqtada made this decision because he felt that such extremist beliefs could not be tolerated in his movement and, thus, proposed this as an act of repentance. The declaration was most likely a show for the public, while Muqtada, as his father, continued to enjoy these groups' support and be active in politics. Chalak, Chenar (2023). "Sadr Freezes Movement, Deactivate Twitter." *Rudaw*. (<https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/14042023>) (Last accessed 02/01/24). al-Musawi, Haider (2023). "Sadr's Withdrawal and the New Splinter Group of Ashab al-Qadiya." *Fikra Forum, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/sadrs-withdrawal-and-new-splinter-group-ashab-al-qadiya>) (Last Accessed 02/01/24). The presence of such groups such as the *sulukiyyun* also in the 1990s is an interesting insight to the different currents within the Sadrism movement in the period, a very difficult topic to explore.

⁷⁴⁰ He was hinting that he himself was the leading imam of the nation as long as he could perform the Friday prayer. al-Simri (2019) *Dawr al-Marḡa'iyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 88. Al-Simri proposes that Sadr proposed himself as the Imam as long as he could perform the Friday prayer. This would solve the problem of understanding who should lead the community while the Imam is absent and thus his critique of other kinds of leadership.

These recurring themes of Sadr's thought are the main points of Sadr's project of reform. This project was aimed at reforming, in the first place, the hawza and the institution of the marja'iyya. In the second place, reforming these two institutions would also impact the believers' community, bringing to Islamisation of society. Finally, Sadr's reform would also clash with the Iraqi Regime's Interests, as we shall see in the following chapters. The central point of Sadr's project was not capturing political power but, in the first place, spreading a cultural revolution, reforming the hawza, the clerical institutions, the believers' conception of Islam, and Islamising society.

Nevertheless, all this aimed to change the cultural environment and prepare for the Mahdi's return. The clash with the Iraqi Regime would come only as a consequence of the Islamisation of society and the need to continue to appear as an opposition movement, as well as the Regime's growing preoccupation with the expanding power of Sadrist. The objective expressed in Sadr's works is to Islamize society, not to take political power. Ultimately, the Islamization of society would create the conditions for the Mahdi's return. Once this objective is reached, political power will be obtained through the Mahdi's war to fill Earth with equity and justice. There will be no need for a debate on the Islamic state's structure or the Jurists' Guardianship; the Mahdi will rule over Earth until Judgement Day.⁷⁴¹

As we have seen, the focus on a millenarian hope perfectly fit the situation of many Iraqis in the 1990s, and it was advantageous in attracting people to the Sadrist movement. Furthermore, the focus on Mahdist doctrine, even though from an activist point of view, was probably less worrisome for the Iraq Regime than a revolutionary doctrine, be it Khomeinist or close to Da'wa, and even the goal of spreading knowledge of Islam in society, at that point, run parallel with the Ba'ath "Faith Campaign."

All the same, Sadr criticized the hawza and the Jurists' authority, hoping to reform it as an essential tool in the Islamisation of society he wanted to implement to prepare for the Mahdi's return. Sadr criticized the maraja' and the hawza for being elitist in using a language that nobody understands, not being worried about the everyday problems of lay believers, not trying to communicate with them, and not sharing their sufferings. Furthermore, they also lacked humility and piety and did and said nothing in front of injustice against the Shi'a community, showing their cowardice and weakness, according to Sadr.⁷⁴²

⁷⁴¹ Mervin and Mouline (2017). *Islam politiques*, p. 147. Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*.

⁷⁴² al-Simrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marja' iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 83. Al-Simri says that the critique of the establishment became less aggressive at the end of his predication as some of the other maraja'ah, seeing the persecutions against him, changed their positions toward him and his work. Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*.

These points were aimed at building a new kind of clerical establishment, a militant one, that would embody the *fighting hawza* the Sadr mentions in his sermons. He draws a strong line of separation between the *fighting* or the *outspoken* hawza (al-ḥawzah al-Muğāhidah/al-Nāṭiqah) and the *silent* hawza (al-ḥawzah al-Sāmitah), embodied by clerics who did not have a militant approach to religion.⁷⁴³ As we have seen in the introduction, Sadr did not just criticize the model for the construction of an Islamic state proposed by other clerics; he also challenged the characteristics a cleric should embody to lead such a state. Since he was not widely recognized among his peers for his scholarly standing and he did not have access, as we have seen, to the traditional hawza networks, he tried to build his leadership on a mix of traditional and innovative points. This practical need can also be found theorized in his works. He stressed his scholarly learning, declaring himself the most knowledgeable of scholars and challenging anybody to prove him wrong; the lack of responses to this challenge, not even by Sistani, who was the recipient of this challenge, was seen as confirmation of this claim, by his followers, at least.⁷⁴⁴ Critics attacked Sadr, saying his marja'iyya was invalid as he had not published a treaty of practical Islamic jurisprudence, Risālah 'Amaliyyah. Sadr's supporters answered by saying that he had done so not just in one volume but many and that Sistani as well had not published major treaties in Islamic practical law.⁷⁴⁵ Simultaneously, Sadr used his charisma and connection to the Iraqi people to support his authority, with an almost populist style of leadership not often seen among Shi'a scholars.⁷⁴⁶

Even though he constantly criticized quietism, as we have highlighted, Sadr used a *quietist stratagem* in the first part of his political activity, as defined by Blaydes. Only in late 1998 was he pushed to challenge the Regime openly, abandoning any caution for reasons we will explore in the next chapter.

Nevertheless, as we shall see in the sermons, this critique of the clerical establishment aimed at reform, not a total revolution, so often, Sadr calls for obedience to the hawza while

⁷⁴³ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 372.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 371. al-Sadr (2013). *Mawā'it wa Liqā'āt Ayah Allah al-'Uẓmā al-Sayyid al-Šahīd Muḥammad al-Šadr*, pp. 40 – 45. Sadr mainly bases his claim of being the most knowledgeable of all scholars in the hawza on the fact that he had studied both with al-Khu'i and Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, and the few who could boast such claim had dispersed and had not his proficiency in Islamic jurisprudence.

⁷⁴⁵ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 371. Hasan quotes this website listing Sadr's publications that summed up would make Sadr's treaty on practical Islamic law: <https://tinyurl.com/43na9yad>.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 368, 372, 375, 384.

criticizing it.⁷⁴⁷ He calls for politicizing the institution of the marja'iyya, insisting on the importance of political militantism and contact with the believers rather than scholarly knowledge.

⁷⁴⁷ We can see that from the many times Sadr repeats in his sermons that believers have to obey the marja'iyyah and the hawza, and it is a good sign when they do. For instance, see al-Simri: *Al-Sadr declared this fact in one of his sermons, commenting on the incident of canceling the Sha'ban pilgrimage to Karbala by the State, where he said: "This is a good gesture because you have proven by experience that if the Hawza tells you to speak, you speak, and if it tells you to be quiet, you remain silent. And by the grace of God, although the march to Karbala did not take place in the extensive way that we wished for, it bore its good fruit and produced good results in the cause of God Almighty and the support of his religion and it showed the solidarity of the whole Iraqi people, especially in the centre and the south, to work for the sake of God and sacrifice for religion.* Sīmī (2019) *Dawr al-Marğa'iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 88.

2.3 Third Chapter: Growth and Repression of the Sadrist Movement in the mid-1990s.

2.3.1 The Sadrists' profile: Tribal Networks, Towns' Outskirts, and Sadrist Strongholds.

Having described the teachings and the reform project that Sadr wanted to spread among the Iraqi population and the system of schools, students, agents, *mumathilin*, and commissions that he had built to do so, we will look at the social profiles of the people these teachings and system were addressed to. In analyzing Sadr's followers' social profile, we will also point to Iraqi society's already-mentioned "tribalisation" during the 1990s and its role in Sadr's gathering of followers. Through this analysis, we will also look at where these people came from and, thus, we will be able to pinpoint where Sadr had large numbers of followers and the consequent consolidation of the Movement in certain "strongholds."

The Iraqi society in the 1990s, as we briefly highlighted in the first chapter, faced many hardships during the 1990s. Moreover, as we highlighted in our account of the conditions of a large share of the Iraqi population during the 90s, there was a general return to tribal networks to face the economic and social crisis. Amatzia Baram, in his analysis of Neo-tribal politics in Saddam's Iraq, highlights how the 90s, the tribal references in the political language of the Baath Regime, reached a peak.⁷⁴⁸ Moreover, the presence of tribal leaders in political and public events of the Iraqi State dramatically increased, along with the attention given to one's tribal affiliation, which had always been a mark of Saddam's rule informally. However, in the 1990s, it became a more visible policy.⁷⁴⁹ Baram notes: *The decline of the urban educated classes was accentuated when the regime started to introduce tribal traditions into the all-Iraqi legal system. Occasionally even political-strategic thinking was*

⁷⁴⁸ Saddam tribalized Baath policies in the 90s according to Baram analysis. Baram (1997). *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq*, p. 1. *In Iraq, in the first place in the seat of power, but also in the countryside, pseudo- or neo-tribal values, hidden beneath socialist, egalitarian, and modernizing party rhetoric, were implicitly promoted. "Neo" because, as will be suggested, the context of many tribal phenomena promoted by the Ba'ath was a far cry from the traditional context of tribal behavior and norms. When a highly centralized regime makes use of tribal values to reimpose its full control over its population, what emerges is something new and very different from the traditional set of values.* Ibid., p. 4. *In the period 1988-90, the tribal policy of the regime was officially recognized.* Ibid., p. 7. *The Ba'athist ideology after 1991 became made of tribalism, Arabism, Islam and Mesopotamian past.* Ibid., p. 7.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

defined as tribal. By 1995, the village had conquered the city.⁷⁵⁰ During the '91 Intifada, when Ba'athist officials were found totally disconnected from the realities they were supposed to control, especially in Southern Iraq,⁷⁵¹ Saddam understood the centrality of tribal support in ruling the country.⁷⁵² As Baram states, *During the Intifada, Saddam identified the potential of cultivating the tribal shaykhs, and having crushed the Intifada, he was quick to exploit this potential.*⁷⁵³ In the uprising of '91, most of the tribal countryside stood still, waiting for the outcome of the revolt, not offering open support to the rebels. Some tribes assisted the Regime, while others remained neutral.⁷⁵⁴

Sadr also probably perceived the importance of tribes and the role of their apathy in the failure of the 1991 Uprising. Perhaps he could also understand the Regime's strategy of trying to win them to its cause, giving him more reason to attempt to do the same. In 1991, Sadr visited some important Iraqi tribes in southern Iraq to discuss an agreement with the Sheikhs that would push them to respect Islamic law, trying to adjust tribal customs when they violated Islamic prescriptions.⁷⁵⁵ He tried to establish contact with the tribal leaders in the hope of their support in terms of manpower, to increase his popular support base, and to gain economic support, all essential elements to sustain his claim to the marja'iyya. Interestingly, we find evidence of such an agreement even in the Ba'ath party archive, but much later, in 1999, signaling that Sadr had implemented this strategy throughout the decade.⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁵⁰ Baram (1997). *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq*, p. 21. Tripp, (2007). *A History of Iraq*, p. 253. Baram also defines tribe, which might help understand this social entity in the Iraqi context. *'Tribe' may be used loosely of a ... group in which kinship [or a myth thereof] is the dominant idiom of organization, and whose members consider themselves culturally distinct... Tribes are usually politically unified... They do not usually relate directly with the state, but only through ... intermediate structures.* Baram (1997). *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq*, p 21.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid., p. 7. Machlis (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State," p. 14.

⁷⁵² Sakai (2003). *The 1991 Intifada in Iraq*, p. 166.

⁷⁵³ Baram (1997). *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq*, p. 8.

⁷⁵⁴ Baram states: *A relevant reason for tribes' remaining on the sideline may be the fact that the Intifada occurred in March when the countryside was getting ready for the harvest. Disturbing the peace at such a time was highly unpopular with many peasants.*⁵³ *Also, for many years the regime had been harping on tribal-Arab chords, warning against Iranian designs on Iraq and the Arabs. These tribes saw themselves as Arab, retaining their old Arab cultural traits. This Arab pedigree and culture were no less important to them than their Shi'i affiliation, which, in many cases, was relatively new, dating back only to the 19th century or later.* Ibid., p. 10. Or also: *Yet another explanation may be the fact that the tribes traditionally were less integrated into the political and intellectual trends of the larger cities, with the result that they were less ideological or religious than the city dwellers.* Ibid., p. 10.

⁷⁵⁵ Machlis, p. 13. The agreement focused on not accepting people who are apostates or polytheists and demanding the jurists' opinion on all matters. "Blood money" to repay homicide or blessing should remain within the boundaries of Sharia.

⁷⁵⁶ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0593, 0600, 0601, 0602, 0603 (11/02/99). BRCC 01_2123_0001_0028 (1998).

In the introduction to his book, *The Law of the Tribes*, which was probably penned precisely to win over Iraqi tribes in line with this strategy, Sadr shows that he is well aware of the tribes' power in Iraq. He states that *the tribes have more power to implement the Shari'a than many others*.⁷⁵⁷ However, he is also aware of the problems of coming to terms with the tribes for a religious scholar like him who wants to create an Islamic movement. He states: *it is surprising, after all, we see many tribes' systems and traditions explicitly violating the Shari'a, and yet you know that they [the tribes] would have more power in implementing the Shari'a than any other*.⁷⁵⁸

The book, published in 1997 and relatively short, is the first in Islamic jurisprudence, as no scholar has tried dealing with tribal costumes.⁷⁵⁹ It consists of a collection of questions and answers concerning Islamic legal problems. These mainly focus on the conciliation between tribal customs and Islamic Law to safeguard tribal traditions without breaking Islamic Law and principles. Sadr tried to reconcile forms of religious popularity, such as celebrations for Imam Hussain's Martyrdom, the prophet's birthday, and similar occasions, with official religious legal norms.⁷⁶⁰ Also, he tried to solve questions related to tribal property traditions, often violating those imposed by Islamic Law. While not one of the most important works on a theoretical level, it is essential socially and politically for the development of the Movement, as it signals Sadr's interest in the Iraqi tribes. Indeed, Sadr's interest in accommodating tribal costumes is connected to his will to build a social and cultural movement, as highlighted by Blaydes, by making tribespeople his supporters and believers in his cause.⁷⁶¹ In this sense, creating a good relationship with tribal chieftains and their tribe members, showing respect and will to deal with their traditions, often condemned as unIslamic, might have provided a large support base for Sadr, as also highlighted by Sheikh S..⁷⁶² Sadr did not only try to connect with the tribal environments through his works. As we have seen on other occasions, he both works on a theoretical level, producing works in *Fiqh* or Islamic philosophy, and, at the same time, working on a more practical level. In

⁷⁵⁷ al-Ṣadr (1996). *Fiqh al-ʿAṣāir*, p. 10.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

⁷⁵⁹ Machlis (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State," p. 14.

⁷⁶⁰ al-Ṣadr (1996). *Fiqh al-ʿAṣāir*.

⁷⁶¹ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 331.

⁷⁶² *In assessing the nature of the conversion and its impact on the religious identity of the tribesmen, I suggest that the conversion did not permeate their former social and moral values, which still functioned underneath the mantle of Shi'i Islam on the eve of the formation of the Iraqi monarchy.* Nakash, Yitzhak (1994). *The Shi'is of Iraq*, p. 444. Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).

The conversion of the tribes did not eclipse their former Arab moral and social values, which continued to function underneath the cloak of Shi'i Islam well into the 20th century. Ibid., p. 460.

this sense, he sent several of his representatives to the sheiks of Iraqi tribes in southern Iraq.⁷⁶³ In particular, Sayyid Kahdim al-Husseini reports the story of Muhammad al-Tufi, Sadr's *mumathil*, who was sent to meet with the tribes living near Basra and spread Sadr's ideas among them.⁷⁶⁴ Later on, in 1998 and 1999, we also have reports from the Regime that copies of this book were circulating in southern Iraq, along with an audiotape of Sadr calling on tribes to abandon unIslamic practices.⁷⁶⁵ Sadr understood the added value of tribal networks to his own religious network. Other than considering Sadr's interest in broadening the base of his supporters, we could also consider his interest in contacting tribal chiefs. The chiefs were influential figures. Sadr might have been interested in strengthening his relationship with them to access their tribes members and economic resources.⁷⁶⁶

The tribes' importance for the Shi'a clerics was a long-standing issue in Iraq, which brought to the effort of converting the tribes during the 19th century.⁷⁶⁷ Between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, Wahhabi attacks from the Arabian Peninsula endangered the holy Shi'a centers of Iraq, Najaf and Karbala.⁷⁶⁸ These two cities regained popularity as strongholds of Shi'ism at the end of the 18th century. This phenomenon also happened thanks to a flux of Shi'a scholars emigrating from Persia in the period. In his study on the conversion of Iraqi tribes to Shi'ism, Nakash argues that *The Wahhabi attacks and the pressures of Iraq's tribes on the Shi'i cities were major checks on their development. This particularly alarmed the Persian ulama who had migrated to Iraq between 1722 and 1763 and lacked a solid socioeconomic base in the country. Seen from their point of view, the conversion of the tribes to Shi'ism was essential to bolstering their position in southern Iraq*

⁷⁶³ Interview with Sheikh R. (08/06/2024), Baghdad. Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024).

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁵ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0593, 0600, 0601, 0602, 0603 (11/02/99). BRCC 01_2123_0001_0028 (1998).

⁷⁶⁶ As we previously stated, exploring the economy of the Sadrist movement is extremely challenging, and we could gather little data on it. Thus, we are forced to make some guesses on the topic, trying to understand where Sadr's resources came from and where he looked to collect more of these resources.

⁷⁶⁷ *At the core of this process [of conversion] were the rise of Najaf and Karbala as the two strongholds of Shi'ism from the mid-18th century following the collapse of the Safavid state, the Wahhabi attacks on the two cities, the functioning of Najaf and Karbala as Iraq's major desert market towns, the change in the water flow of the Euphrates, and most importantly, the Ottoman policy of tribal settlement beginning in 1831. The transition of the tribes from nomadic life to agricultural activity disrupted tribal order and created a major crisis among the tribesmen, forcing them to reconstruct their identity and relocate themselves on the socioreligious map of their surrounding environment. The conversion was facilitated by the proliferation of sayyids (descendants of the Prophet), who soothed the fragmentation of Iraq's tribal system. The scale of the conversion changed according to the region as the factors mentioned above had a varying degree of influence on the marshes, the central and southern Euphrates, and the Tigris area.* Nakash, Yitzhak (1994). *The Conversion of Iraq's Tribes to Shiism*. International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 443, 444.

⁷⁶⁸ *The Wahhabi attacks on Najaf and Karbala reinforced the sectarian identity of the Shi'i ulama and increased their motivation to convert the tribes.* Ibid., p. 446.

*and maintaining their independent status vis-'a-vis the Sunni government in Baghdad.*⁷⁶⁹ There was also an economic dimension to the will to convert the Iraqi tribes to Shi'ism, also detected by Nakash in his study. *Moreover, religion was the major resource of Najaf and Karbala and the main force driving their economic activity, which relied heavily on charities, pilgrimage, and the corpse traffic from Iran - a practice of Shi'i believers to transport their dead for burial in cemeteries in the shrine cities. The nomadic tribes of Iraq were not inclined to visit the sacred shrines, nor did they attach any religious importance to them. Their conversion may therefore have been regarded by the Shi'i ulama as an opportunity to increase the number of potential believers, contributors, and pilgrims. Thus, the need to secure the sacred shrine cities and to augment their sources of income by creating a local economic base helps explain the drive of the Shi'i ulama to convert the tribes.*⁷⁷⁰ For their part, Iraqi tribesmen were interested in converting to Shi'is as this would have meant avoiding conscription into the Ottoman Army, expanding in that period to face European rivals.⁷⁷¹ These conversions might also help to explain the rise of a merchant class in Najaf and Karbala, starting to draw a line between the different social classes within the Shi'a community in Iraq that would later become a more profound division in the second half of the 20th century.

Najaf and Karbala's economic role also increased due to the change in the water flow of the Euphrates. The irrigation channels built in the area by the Ottoman government gave new life to the countryside around the Shrine cities. These, coupled with the settlement policy followed by the Ottomans toward tribes to collect their taxes more efficiently, brought many tribes into the orbit of the Shi'a clerics of Najaf and Karbala.⁷⁷² The settlement policy by the Ottoman also weakened tribal Sheikhs and the tribal order, making the Iraqi tribes ready to accept new religious leadership.⁷⁷³

The Ottoman land reform entitling lands to tribal chiefs and destroying the shared ownership of lands would start to drive a wedge between chiefs, their clerical allies, and tribespeople.⁷⁷⁴ Later, land reforms implemented by the Ba'ath continued in this direction. Baram states: *In the south, the new phase of the [Ba'ath] land reform also held the promise of driving a wedge between the Shi'i peasants on the one hand and their saddah and ulama,*

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 446.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 447.

⁷⁷¹ Davis (2014). *Islamism, Authoritarianism, and Democracy*, p. 208.

⁷⁷² Ibid., pp. 447 – 450.

⁷⁷³ Machlis (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State," p. 4.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 449, 450.

supported by the Shi'i tribal shaykhs and landlords on the other.⁷⁷⁵ This detachment of Shi'a peasants from Shi'a clerics might also help us understand Sadr's will to reconnect these two realities and gather support among this class for his political and reformist project.⁷⁷⁶ Other than the division brought by these land reforms, the rural Shi'a population was poorly served in terms of religious institutions, with one religious institution every 37,000 people, showing the lack of interest of the marjaiyya in reaching out to this part of the Shi'a community.⁷⁷⁷ For this reason, the tribes' conversion to Shi'ism mainly remained connected to the rites such as *Ashura* and the cult of Shi'a Imams and the like, while tribal costumes were still followed to regulate daily life.⁷⁷⁸ Often, these costumes contrasted with Islamic jurisprudence, and from this, Sadr's need to address these issues with his book. This lack of interest continued even after many people from these communities migrated to the shanty towns in Baghdad and Basra from the southern regions, primarily the Maysan governorate.⁷⁷⁹ This migration, which started in the second half of the 1940s and continued for the rest of the second half of the 20th century, was fuelled by the abovementioned disruption of life in rural Iraq, poverty, and famine at the end of the 1940s and throughout the 1950s.⁷⁸⁰

These immigrants, generally making up the poorest residents of Iraqi cities, were the most sensible to Sadr's message of millenarian hope, revenge against injustice, and focus on rites such as *Ashura*, *Arabin*, the exaltation of Imam Hussein's chivalry and virtues and the like, as we highlighted. Migrating from southern Iraq, these groups' social fabric went through a breakdown,⁷⁸¹ but they still retained their tribal heritage and tradition, which helped them create and renew networks of solidarity based on this heritage during the crisis of the 1990s, also reconnecting with their regions of origin.⁷⁸² These years also witnessed a comeback of tribal values and traditions, something Sadr understood and tried to deal with, as shown by his work *The Jurisprudence of the Tribes*.

⁷⁷⁵ Baram (1997). *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq*, p. 4.

⁷⁷⁶ Al-Simri states that the communication between the Hawza and the tribes lacked any substance, if it was present at all. al-Simri (2019) *Dawr al-Marğa'iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 55.

⁷⁷⁷ Hasan (2021), p. 374.

⁷⁷⁸ Machlis (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State," p. 4. Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*.

⁷⁷⁹ Machlis (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State," p. 5. Hiro (1989). *The Longest War*, p. 22.

⁷⁸⁰ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, pp. 333, 334. Baram (1997). *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq*, pp. 3, 4. [...] *the Qasim regime [1958 - 1963] abolished the 1933 Law Governing the Rights and Duties of Cultivators. This released the peasants from the legal bonds that tied them to their landlords, enabling them to move and settle in the cities.*

⁷⁸¹ Kubba (2004). *Iraqi Shia Politics*, p. 144.

⁷⁸² Machlis (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State," p. 2. Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 374.

As we have seen, the Regime as well weighed in this return to tribal values. The transition from a more Arab-socialist ideology and Pan-Arabism to Iraqism, tribal and religious values, exemplified in the “Faith Campaign,” also determined a shift in economic policies. According to Abdul Jabbar’s analysis, *nationalist socialism changed of direction from command economy, state-guaranteed employment, and free social services, to deregulation, commercialization, and pauperism. The middle classes to which most of the young war generation belonged or yearned to join, and which were the backbone of the Baath regime, now plunged into the abyss.*⁷⁸³ These policy changes added up to the crisis caused by the UN sanctions and the destruction caused by the wars Iraq was involved in the 1980s and early 1990s. Furthermore, as we previously pointed out, central and southern Iraq’s inhabitants were mainly cut out of the clanic networks at the heart of the Regime.⁷⁸⁴

These immigrants, especially the second generations that during the 1990s were in their early 20s, were among the most hit by the consequences of the events outlined in the first chapter and became the bulk of Sadr’s supporters.⁷⁸⁵ They were the group that, along with the “war generation” described by Abdul Jabbar, saw no hope or a possible better future in the 1990s, harboring many grievances against the Ba’ath Regime and, thus, ready to welcome a new hope and a discourse criticizing the current situation.

Most of Sadr’s students/agents we could interview belonged to these two groups, people with a tribal heritage from southern Iraq and heavily impacted by the events of the 1980s and early 1990s. They came from Baghdad, specifically Madinat Saddam, and others from Basra, specifically the Ḥayāniyyah neighborhood, Najaf and Kufa, and small towns all over Southern and Central Iraq.⁷⁸⁶ Interestingly, though, most people from Madina Saddam belonged to families originating from the region of Maysan, to which they still had many connections. Most of them also came from families that were generally religious or

⁷⁸³ Abdul Jabbar, (2004). *The War Generation in Iraq*, pp. 134 135.

⁷⁸⁴ Baram (1997). *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq*.

⁷⁸⁵ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0883, 0885, 0886, 0888 - 0890 (12/01/99). Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend. Furthermore, the failure of the Ba’ath land reform, combined with new jobs in the towns, resulted in a new wave of emigration from village to town. This, too, weakened the rural tribal units. Some tribes split, others almost disappeared, and still others lost much of their sense of unity of interest and purpose. Indeed, according to government statistics, the urban population of Iraq increased by 206.1 percent between 1965 and 1988, but the rural population increased during the same period by only 18.6 percent. And whereas in 1965 roughly half the population was still living in the countryside, in 1988 only 27 percent lived there. Usually, those who move to town are the young, with more skills and entrepreneurial spirit. This meant that by 1991 the tribal countryside had been bled white. Yet, in part because the tribal system was used by the regime, the tribes and their chiefs did not disappear.* Baram (1997). *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq*, p. 3.

⁷⁸⁶ Interview with Hajj Q. Qasim al-Swehili, Baghdad (24/02/2024). Interview with A. B. J., Baghdad (23/11/2023). Interview with Sayyid J., Najaf (29/11/2023). Interview with M. K., Najaf (31/05 – 01/06/2024). Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024).

conservative but without any specific involvement in previous Islamist movements.⁷⁸⁷ Of course, we also have some notable exceptions, and we find Sadr's students who belong to families with a long history of Islamic activism.⁷⁸⁸ At the same time, most of Sadr's followers came from a poor or low-income/middle-class background.⁷⁸⁹ This data is essential information as it allows us to pinpoint this group as one that suffered the most from the consequences of UN sanctions and wars during the 1990s and to individuate the bulk of Sadr's supporters as an intersection of the low-income/middle-class from the socio-economic point of view and of the war generation and the 1990s youth from the generational point of view.⁷⁹⁰ Henceforth, they were among those who had the most grievances during this decade, were marginalized from political and economic power centers and dispossessed, and could rely only on their informal family-tribal networks to support themselves in such a difficult time. Sadr, as we have seen, answered their demands for both a guide and a hope, offered in the form of a revolutionary-millennarist doctrine and a network of support.⁷⁹¹ Thus, it is not surprising that most of Sadr's supporters came from this group, and we also

⁷⁸⁷ Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with Ahmad Abu Jaafar, Baghdad (23/11/2023). Interview with N. E., Kufa (31/05/2024). Interview with Sheikh H. R., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with M. K., Najaf (29/11/2023). Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh H. , Baghdad (03/12/2023). Sadiq al-Hasnawi, Najaf (03/03/2024). Interview with S., Najaf (29/05/2024).

⁷⁸⁸ Interview with Hajj Q., Baghdad (24/02/2024). Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024). Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

⁷⁸⁹ al-Simrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marja' iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, pp. 45 - 52. Al-Simri also states that popular strata of the population and tribal groups represented the most significant part of the Sadrist Movement. Still, there were also merchants, city notables, and clan leaders. But still, he says that the most involved in the movement were popular strata and clan members. He also adds that since the removal of the monarchy, the religious leaders had grown detached from the general population and had only maintained contact with merchants and city notables. He also notes that, in fact, al-Da'wa was an elite and conservative party. Al-Simri also supports the idea that the good relationship between the merchants and the marja'iyya was also given by the fact that the marja'iyya had a relatively small political role. Machlis proposes the interesting theory that Sadr appealed to more popular strata of the Iraqi population with his focus on popular religious rites and writing dealing with Tribal Costumes while trying to appeal to a more educated but also impoverished middle-class, with works on innovative aspects of Shi'a jurisprudence, such as *Fiqh al-Mawḍū'āt al-Ḥadītha* (The Jurisprudence of Modern Topics) or *Fiqh al-faḍā'* (The Jurisprudence of Space). Machlis (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State," pp. 7, 8. al-Ṣadr, Muḥammad (2010). *Fiqh al-Mawḍū'āt al-Ḥadītha*. (The Jurisprudence of Modern Topics). Beirut: Dār wa-Maktaba al-Baṣā'ir. al-Ṣadr, Muḥammad (1998). *Fiqh al-Faḍā'* (The Jurisprudence of Space). Beirut: Dār wa-Maktaba al-Baṣā'ir. al-Asadī, Muḥtār (2017). *al-Ṣadr al-Ṭānī. al-Ṣāhid al-Ṣāhid. Al-Zāharah wardūd al-Fa'il* (The Second Sadr. The Witness and the Martyr. The Phenomenon and the Active Responses). Bayrūt: Dār al-Saḡgād, pp. 27–37. al-Ṣadr, Muḥammad (2010). *Nazarāt al-Islāmiyyah fī al-Huqūq al-Insān*. (Islamic Reflections on Human Rights). Naḡaf: Haya'ah Turāṭ al-Ṣāhid al-Sa'id al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ṣadr. Hasan (2021), p. 371. Hasan points out that these kinds of works might have been a way to gain credibility as an Islamic intellectual in other ways instead of following only the traditional path for Shi'i mujtahids.

⁷⁹⁰ Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*. Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 374.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid., p. 347. Albrecht (2013). *Raging Against the Machine*, p. 12. Albrecht notices that under authoritarian regimes, political parties or movements are tied together by kinship, tribe, neighborhood, and material bonds. Providing distribution of material goods and distributing them within the aforementioned bonds is also what the Sadrist movement did in the 1990s, based on an intersection of kinship, tribe, neighborhood ties and groups with similar material needs.

understand Sadr's interest in tribal networks and environment and their importance in Iraqi society during the 1990s. At the same time, looking at this information, we understand why many of Sadr's followers were located in Madina Saddam, Basra, Ammara, and Kufa, with these cities becoming Sadrist strongholds.⁷⁹² These were also the most influential Shi'a communities in the country, along with Kadhimiyyah, which also had historically been the seat of the Sadr family, and Najaf and Karbala. At the same time, these areas, especially Madina Saddam, the outskirts of Basra, and the region of al-Ammara, were home to large groups of marginalized communities ([See annex n. 3](#)). They were safe havens for deserters and opposers to the Regime due to the history of the creation of these neighborhoods and the lack of attention, both from the religious leadership and the state, to areas such as the Maysan region.⁷⁹³

Indeed, the Shi'a merchant community of Najaf and Baghdad were not among the supporters of the Sadrist Movement since they had been historically close to the institution of the hawza and the marja'iyya that Sadr attacked and criticized, to whom he looked like an outsider. This also points to the different classes that supported the Sadrist movement and the Da'wah party. As pointed out, the Da'wa was not a mass movement and primarily relied on the support of higher and merchant classes, while the Sadrist attracted other groups.⁷⁹⁴ This point helps us understand the discontinuity between the two movements, often confusingly connected by using the fact that Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, an important figure in al-Da'wa, and Muhammad al-Sadr were cousins.

Parallel to this tribalization of Iraqi society in the 1990s, sectarianization also took place in the same period. As we previously mentioned, many of the events of the 1980s and the early 1990s had a weighty impact on the Iraqi Shi'a community. Even if this was not directly or only targeted for being Shi'a, the repression and destruction that hit this community brought a solidification of sectarian boundaries in the 1990s.⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹² Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*. Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 374. Machlis (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State," pp. 14, 15.

⁷⁹³ Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid. Abdul Jabbar (2004). *The Shite movement in Iraq*, p. 105. Machlis (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State," p. 5

⁷⁹⁵ Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*. Abdul Jabar, (2004). *The War Generation in Iraq*, pp. 134, 135. Haddad, Fanar (2014). *Sectarianism in Iraq. Antagonistic Visions of Unity*. New York: Oxford University Press. Patel (2022). *Order Out of Chaos*, pp. 38, 39.

2.3.2 The Regime's Repression between 1992 – 1996.

As we have already mentioned a few times, Sadr and his followers and representatives enjoyed some degree of liberty on the part of the Iraqi Regime as they were seen as instrumental in the “Faith Campaign,” the spreading of religiosity in Iraq in the 1990s, and the control of the Shi’i religious environment, presenting an “Arab marja” against a “Persian” one. Nevertheless, they were not totally exempted from the Regime’s repression, and even before 1997, there were some cases of repression against Sadr’s representatives and followers, also as a part of the general repression of the Shia community that we pointed out. Sheikh K., one of Sadr’s representatives charged with delivering lessons on Islam, was arrested for short periods and released nine times throughout the 1990s.⁷⁹⁶ Another of Sadr’s students and representatives stated that 50% of the Hawza students, most connected to Sadr, were arrested at least once during the 1990s. The same student, Sheikh Q. K., was arrested in 1995 by security forces in Najaf, with the accusation of “hating the state and Saddam and wanting their downfall.” He is subsequently freed only because the security forces officer who arrested him discovers they come from the same tribe, al-Ka’abi, pointing to the importance of tribal relationships again.⁷⁹⁷ Sheikh Riyadh al-Saad was also arrested in 1996 and released shortly after.⁷⁹⁸ Another of Sadr’s students, Salim al-Abboudi, was not so lucky; he was arrested in 1995, and his house was razed.⁷⁹⁹ Sayyid Y. M., also a student in the hawza, was arrested in 1996 after the arrest of his uncle the year before, and after he was kept under house arrest in Baghdad for the whole of 1995. He was arrested because of his family connections with the Sadr family, their previous involvement with the 1977 and 1979 revolts, and their reputation for being Khomeinists. Also, while Sayyid Y. was in Baghdad in 1995, under house arrest, he continued serving as an agent for Sadr, spreading his ideas, distributing his books, and the like. He remained in prison until 2001. According to him, there were almost no other Sadrists in prison in 1996; he was the only one in the Abu Ghraib prison. Most of the Sadrists started to get incarcerated in 1999.⁸⁰⁰ This information helps us measure the degree of repression against Sadrists in this period and see when it increased drastically.

⁷⁹⁶ Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

⁷⁹⁷ Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

⁷⁹⁸ Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

⁷⁹⁹ Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

⁸⁰⁰ Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024).

Nevertheless, in those years, the Regime hit some influential clerics not connected to Sadr, signaling the continuing pressure on the religious environment even during the “Faith Campaign,” and especially on non-Sadrists.⁸⁰¹ Muhammad Taqī al-Khu’i (1958 – 1994), son of Ayatollah al-Khu’i, died in uncertain circumstances in 1994, probably with the involvement of the Regime, as he had participated in al-Khu’i’s committee for governing Najaf during the 1991 uprising.⁸⁰² This death weakened, even more, the Khu’i network in Iraq, depriving it of one of its leaders, something that went in favor of the expanding Sadrist network that we described in this chapter.⁸⁰³ At the same time, there were attempts to assassinate Sistani and Sheikh Bashir al-Najafi.⁸⁰⁴

As we explore Sadrist history, we will notice that comparing the repression during this period and the repression that followed in 1998-1999, we can see how it became much more intense after 1998. This change points again to the fact that the development of Sadrism was relatively peaceful and unopposed, as probably there was the perception from the Regime that this movement was bringing forth similar interests to those of the Ba’ath. Also, the Regime in this period probably did not grasp the actual size of this movement, which became apparent in 1997-1998 with the beginning of the Friday Prayers.

⁸⁰¹ Interview with Doctor A. F., Kufa (11/06/2024).

⁸⁰² Interview with Sheikh A. Q., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁸⁰³ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 373.

⁸⁰⁴ Patel (2022). *Order Out of Chaos*, p. 35.

2.4 Second Part Conclusions.

In the second part of the dissertation, we have tried, primarily through interviews, to reconstruct the most obscure part of the Sadrist movement's history, its formative and development periods.

In the first place, we analyzed how Sadr started spreading the news of his marja'iyya, took control of Najaf's religious colleges, and attracted new students. Secondly, we have looked at how he recruited his representatives as a marja' among these students, how they were sent throughout Iraq to spread his teachings using informal lessons in houses and mosques, and how they opened offices to collect religious taxes for Sadr and reports his fatawa. We then explored how this network was structured in a more complex organizational structure, changing Sadr's network as a marja' into something more similar to an organized political movement. The structure, origins, and influences of Sadr's political organization have never been explored because the organization of the movement during that period is a mostly unexplored topic. Thirdly, we have analyzed some of Sadr's more theoretical works on how Sadr spread these ideas to the general public in Iraq between 1992 and 1996 and how all this merged into Sadr's reform project for the hawza and Iraqi society. Finally, we have looked at the socioeconomic profile of Sadr's followers, students, and representatives, the centrality of tribal background in such a profile, and how all this contributed to the creation of Sadrist's strongholds. Then, we have also quickly examined the forms of repression used by the Iraqi Regime toward the Sadrists in this period and its intensity.

All these chapters helped us explore the construction of the Sadrist movement in the first part of the 1990s. Projecting millenarian hopes, spreading a network of representatives and offices, holding lessons, spreading religion, even though with some Regime's support – especially while taking control of the hawza as Sadr might have been the “Arab marja'” the Regime had been looking for – creating a system, although simple, of informal welfare, and probably appearing to many as the only other social and political environment not directly connected to the Regime, Sadr could muster a large number of followers in these years. Such a number reached a critical mass probably around 1996 – 1997 and led the head of the movement and his advisors to take the next step in expanding the movement: the call for communal Friday Prayers. Hence, in the next section, we will discuss the implementation of the Friday Prayers and their consequences.

3. Third Part. Sadrism at its Peak: 1997 – 1999.

This section will explore the moment of maximum expansion of the Sadrist Movement, going from 1997 to 1999, and that corresponded with the celebration of the communal Friday prayers, beginning in October 1997. Thus, We will try to retrace the beginning of the prayers and their expansion, mapping their spread throughout Iraq and listing mosques and imams guiding the prayers. Then, we will focus on when Sadr started leading the prayer in Kufa in April 1998. In both periods, we will try to explore the contents of the sermons held during the prayers to see how they were instrumental in spreading Sadr's ideas and pushing the project of Islamization of society that we explored in the previous chapter. Then, we will also analyze how the start of the Friday prayers opened a new chapter in the relationships with the Iraqi Regime and how this increased the tension between Sadrists and the Regime, finally bringing to a clash and forcing Sadr to face the Regime directly and the consequences of such a clash, something so far he had tried to avoid.

3.1 First Chapter: The Public Establishment of the Sadrist Movement.

3.1.1 Fall 1997: The Beginning of the Friday Prayers.

As the previous chapter shows, the Sadrist movement reached a critical mass of followers and built a solid and widespread network throughout southern and central Iraq. In 1997, it took a step further and started organizing communal Friday Prayers, marking a turning point in the movement's history.⁸⁰⁵

Interestingly, in secondary sources, both in Arabic and Western Languages, the start date of Friday Prayers led by Muhammad al-Sadr is often set on April 16, 1998, coinciding with the first sermon given by Sadr in the Great Mosque of Kufa.⁸⁰⁶ This dating is due to the focus of both groups of secondary literature mainly on the leader of the movement, Muhammad al-Sadr. However, by shifting the focus from the leader to the movement as a whole and using the Ba'ath Party Records and interviews with Sadrist activists, we could reconstruct that the Prayers started six months before that date, at the end of October 1997.⁸⁰⁷

On October 22, 1997 (20 Jumada al-Akhira 1418 h.), the celebrations for the birthday of Sayyidah Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' were held, and the Sadrists organized gatherings, lessons, and group prayers without sermons, as they did for many religious celebrations in the years before, as we have seen in the previous chapter. Right after this celebration, a declaration from Sadr was brought from Najaf to Madina Saddam, ordering that his followers gather for

⁸⁰⁵ Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024).

⁸⁰⁶ The prayer was called for the first time on the 15th of Ša'abān, the date of birth of the Mahdi. al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Šādiq al-Šadr*. Pp. 444, 450. Blaydes (2028). *Sate of Repression*, p. 332. al-Šadr (2013). *Mawā'it wa Liqā'āt Ayah Allah al-'Uzmā al-Sayyid al-Šahīd Muḥammad al-Šadr*, p. 71. Sadr himself confirms that he chose this moment to call for the Friday prayers as he had reached a broad following and his name was known throughout Iraq; if he had done it before, the response would not have been the same.

⁸⁰⁷ Patel points out how prayers started already in 1995, probably referring to communal Friday prayers without a sermon, which, as we shall see, in Shi'a tradition, assume an entirely different theological and political meaning. Thus, highlighting a continuity of Sadrist prayers from 1995 to 1999 is not exact, as, from 1997, prayers took a whole different dimension with Friday sermons being delivered during the ceremonies. Furthermore, Patel states that Sadr *restarted Friday prayers in a handful of mosques*, downsizing quite a bit the number of mosques the movement took control of. According to Regime reports, Sadrists between 1997 and 1999 performed Friday prayers in 43 mosques, and this is most likely an understatement. Patel (2022). *Order Out of Chaos*, p. 24. Prayers without sermons also had a different number of *raka'āt* (pl. of *raka'ah* - genuflection), making it quite a different rite.

the Friday Prayer the following Friday, October 24.⁸⁰⁸ In other cases, a written notice was also published a week before the first prayer, sent to different offices through Sadr's agents and hung in these offices across Iraq or sent directly to Sadr's agents ([See document n. 13](#)).⁸⁰⁹

Sadr officially called for the communal Friday Prayer, relying on its claim to the *wilayat al-'Aam* and, thus, the political leadership of the Shi'a community in the absence of the Hidden Imam, as we have seen at the end of the previous chapter.⁸¹⁰

Furthermore, Sadr declared the Friday prayer a Muslim duty, a statement repeated by many of his representatives.⁸¹¹ This statement is rooted in the historical development of the debate on the Friday prayer in the Shi'a community. Communal prayer was a long-established tradition in Islam. Nevertheless, since the Mahdi's Occultation, the performance of this prayer has represented a juridical problem among the Shi'a, connected with the prerogatives of the Shi'a jurists as representatives of the Imams, that we mentioned in the first chapter. Indeed, the debate focused on the possibility of carrying out a communal Friday prayer in the absence of a legitimate ruler. In Shi'a thought, this leadership role could be performed only by a member of the prophets' family, particularly one of the Imams. One of the characteristics of the Friday prayer is the sermon that whoever is leading the ritual gives. During this address, the name of the community's leader is usually mentioned, and blessings are called upon him. Thus, the performance of the Friday prayer became a way of religiously legitimizing the ruler of the time. Since Shi'a regarded every ruler after the Mahdi as illegitimate, performing this ritual became subject to heated debates.

During the Safavid rule in Iran (1501 - 1736), when the country's religion officially became Shi'ism, the prayer was reintroduced as the rulers were regarded, at least by clerics close to the court, as legitimate, since they were Shi'is and had a claim to descending from the Prophet's family.⁸¹² In this period, apart from the clerics supporting the Safavid rulers, other clerics implemented the Friday prayer but as a tool for asserting clerics' independence. The institution of the prayer would mean that they laid a claim to the title of deputies of the

⁸⁰⁸ Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).

⁸⁰⁹ Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024).

⁸¹⁰ Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024). Ra'uf (1999). *Muhammad Muhammad Sādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 147. Sadr published a fatwa declaring attending the Friday prayer and listening to the sermon a duty for all Muslims.

⁸¹¹ Many considered that, even if there was disagreement among the ulama about the compulsory nature of the prayer, it was better to go if there was a prayer. Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyyeh (19/06/2024).

⁸¹² Newman, Andrew J. (2011). *Fayad al-Kashani and the Rejection of the Clergy/State Alliance. Friday Prayers as Politics in the Safavid Period*. in Walbridge, Linda S. (ed. by). *The Most Learned of the Shia. The Institution of the Marja' al-Taqlid*. Oxford University Press, pp. 34 – 52, p. 47.

Imam (*al-niyābah al- 'āmmah*) (general deputyship), thus being able to exert also political power.⁸¹³

In contemporary times, the first cleric to approve the reestablishment of Friday prayers with sermons was Muḥammad Mahdī al-Khālīsī (1890–1963). Al-Khalisi was a reformist Iraqi cleric who wanted to transition Shi'a into a modern era. Nevertheless, he was part of a minority and seen as an outcast, a situation worsened by his exile in Iran due to his participation in the 1920 Great Iraqi Revolution against the occupation of Iraq and his activism against the British in the following years. In the years after the establishment of the Qasem regime, Muhsin al-Hakim published a fatwa prohibiting the Friday prayer since the Regime was a secular one. Only a few Khalisi followers continued to perform the Friday prayer in Kadhimiyya, his hometown.⁸¹⁴

In post-revolutionary Iran, Friday prayer was also reintroduced as the Shi'a clerics led the State. The clerics' jurisdiction had been much broadened by Khomeini's book *Wilāyyah al-Faqīh*. In this work, Khomeini extended the scope of the powers of the clerics as representatives of the Imams, giving them authority to lead the State and thus perform the Friday prayer.⁸¹⁵ Sadr enters this debate, declaring Friday prayer the believer's duty, even if the ruler was illegitimate.⁸¹⁶ He states that even in the absence of the Imam and the presence only of his representatives, Friday prayer is a duty.⁸¹⁷ In this sense, Sadr's position on extending the clerics' prerogatives is similar to Khomeini's.⁸¹⁸ Sadr probably was inspired, as we have seen, by the Iranian example during his trip to Iran, but might have also looked at the Khalisi model; there was also geographical proximity as Kadhimyyah was also one of the main centers of the Sadr family in Iraq.

He also clearly saw the prayer as a way of developing clerics' authority in politics. Sadr refused to mention the ruler's name in his sermons, marking his sermons as a tool to broaden clerics' authority rather than a recognition of the actual Regime.⁸¹⁹ This choice shows precise parallelism with clerics asserting their independence from the Safavid court

⁸¹³ Ibid., p. 50.

⁸¹⁴ Machlis (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State," p. 11. Ra'uf (1999). *Muḥammad Muḥammad Sādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 144.

⁸¹⁵ Mavani (2011). *Ayatullah Khomeini's Concept of Governance*, p. 810.

⁸¹⁶ al-Ṣadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, p. 15.

⁸¹⁷ al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Sādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 447. al-Sīmri (2019) *Dawr al-Marġa'iyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 72. *Muhammad al-Sadr says, within the framework of the theoretical basis for Friday prayer, the following: The Friday prayer, although it is a duty of choice, with the presence of the leader of the nation it is obligatory, and this point has been a point of contention among the jurists.*

⁸¹⁸ Machlis (2024). "Shi'a, Tribalism and the Iraqi State," p. 12.

⁸¹⁹ al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Sādiq al-Ṣadr*, pp. 450, 451.

in Iran. Sadr similarly supports his re-establishment of Friday prayer as a believers' duty. During several prayers, Sadr's representatives referred to Sadr as the Wali al-Amr (*Walī al-Amr*).⁸²⁰ This title meant that he was the leader of the Shi'a community and could wield Wilayah al-'Ammah (*wilāyyah al-'āmmah*) and not just Wilayah al-Khassah (*wilāyyah al-ḥāṣṣah*), like the other clerics. His intercession with Imam Ali was asked, and peace was called upon him, as it was usually done with the Imams and the prophets.⁸²¹

On the first day of the Friday Prayers, October 24, in the Mosque of Muhammad Baqir, 6,000 worshipers were registered by the Ba'ath Party reports. Meanwhile, 11,000 were reportedly present at the al-Muhsin Mosque on the same day.⁸²² Attendance has been very high since the beginning, especially among the youth.⁸²³ These high numbers of participants confirm the success of the work done by the movement during the previous years and, according to Sheikh H. S., were also increased by many who joined the first prayers to see what was going on without an earlier particular interest or connection to the movement. Probably, many of these people later continued going to the Prayers, as the numbers continued to swell almost constantly until the Summer of 1998 and then, after a drop in the Summer of 1998, again until Sadr's death ([See table n. 3](#)).⁸²⁴ Regime reports list the names of the first preachers who started the Friday prayer and where it happened.⁸²⁵

In the first report, signaling the start of the Friday prayers in October 1997, Regime's officials asked the section of General Security of Baghdad Rusafa and Karkh for basic information on Muhammad al-Sadr, like full name, the date and place of birth, education, marital status, house address, where does he pray and his opinion and deeds during the 1991 Uprising and any other relevant information on him. In the second section of the same documents, the names of preachers associated with mosques are listed. In the list, we find references to Sheikh Ali Sadiq in Jama' al-Hasan in Madina Saddam; Muhammad al-Sa'aed also in Madina Saddam; Sheikh Samir al-Baghdadi; Hajra al-Fawwaz in Za'feraniyye; Sayyid A.; Sheikh Hussein al-Swe'di, and Sheikh al-Ansari ([See document n. 14](#)).

⁸²⁰ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0792 (25/12/98). BRCC 01_2348_0000_0582 (04/02/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0847 (14/01/99).

⁸²¹ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0670, 0673, 0674 (21/01/99) (18/02/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0635, 0636 (05/02/99).

⁸²² BRCC 01_3560_0000_0005 (27/12/97).

⁸²³ BRCC 01_3560_0000_0192, 0193, 0194 (24/10/97).

⁸²⁴ Interview with Sheikh H. , Baghdad (03/12/2023).

⁸²⁵ This report is not from the Ba'ath Party Archives held at the Hoover Institution. It was shown to us by Sayyid A., who, after the fall of the Regime, could acquire the folder of documents from Ba'ath security services by himself. These documents were sold by ex-employees of the party archives, who often reached out to people or were contacted to sell them.

The second document collects information from the Directorates of Kabrala, Babel, Qadisiyya, Diyyala, and Maysan, with references to Sheikh Jasem Muhammad Hashem, Sheikh Maythal Hannawi, and Sheikh Sa'ad al-Hamdawi ([See document n. 15](#)).

In the third document, we find news from the Directorates of Dhi Qar, Basra, and Num'maniyyeh. In the first one, Sheikh Ali al-Sahlani, Jamal al-Sadiq, Abd Allah Ajiil, and Sheikh Asad al-Naseri are located. In Basra, Sheikh S. and Sheikh al-Hizani lead the prayer in Jama' al-Jumhriyyeh. Finally, in al-Nu'maniyyeh, Kadhem al-Safi and Sheikh Nadir are located by the Regime's agents ([See document n. 16](#)).

Interestingly enough, these documents show us, on the one hand, how the Regime's officials needed, as late as Autumn 1997, basic information on Sadr, such as his full name or his house address; on the other hand, we see how the Regime is precisely tracing all the prayers since their beginning, showing their deep infiltration into Iraqi society. These reports, as others that we will analyze, seem to show how, in 1997, the Friday prayers came as a surprise to the Regime, maybe showing that much of the build-up of the Sadrist movement from 1992 to 1997 was unnoticed or not considered so important to follow up closely.

As we said, the first prayer occurred in the two mosques. In the al-Muhsin Mosque, the more considerable prayer was led by Sheikh Ali Sadiq, one of Sadr's most trustworthy students and agents, and now Imam Juma'.⁸²⁶ Sheikh H. S., who attended this first prayer, recounted that Ali Sadiq himself did not know exactly what to do and how to lead the prayer, as it was the first time he had ever done it. He did not know when to climb on the podium to speak or how to divide the different moments of prayer, sermon, and the like. The same was true for many of the worshipers who had no previous experience in this kind of prayer and had joined mainly out of curiosity. Sheikh H. and his friends who had joined the prayer kept close to the mosque entrance so they could flee in case of a Regime action to disperse the gathering. He described a feeling of curiosity, excitement, and fear during this event.⁸²⁷ A group of people was reported to be present to help the worshipers find a place inside the Mosque and organize the event.⁸²⁸ This information testifies to the diffusion of the movement's organizational structure, which we explored in the previous chapter.

These early gatherings at the end of October 1997, on the 24th and the 31st, were held in various mosques in Madina Saddam, specifically al-Muhsin (al-Muḥsin),⁸²⁹ al-Rasul (al-

⁸²⁶ Interview with Sheikh H. R., Baghdad (19/02/2024). BRCC 01_3560_0000_0192, 0193, 0194 (24/10/97).

⁸²⁷ Interview with Sheikh H. , Baghdad (03/12/2023).

⁸²⁸ BRCC 01_3560_0000_0192, 0193, 0194 (24/10/97).

⁸²⁹ BRCC 01_3560_0000_0005 (27/12/97).

Rasūl),⁸³⁰ and Muhammad Baqir (Muḥammad Bāqir) Mosques.⁸³¹ The local sections of the Ba'ath Party immediately, since October 24, started producing reports to send to the Central Bureau of the Ba'ath Party, reporting on the Prayers and worshipers' activities. In one of these early reports, the one on the prayer held on October 31, 1997, the Regime officially connects these events with Muhammad al-Sadr. In this document, the preacher of the Muhsin Mosque, Ali al-Sadiq (ʿAlī al-Ṣādiq), is reported to have claimed to have been instructed to his role by al-Sadr himself.

The reports on the events of the 24th and the 31st of October 1997 also relate to the sermons held on these occasions. The recurring themes of these sermons, which will also return in the other sermons by Sadr's representatives, highlight the connection with Muhammad al-Sadr by drawing on central themes of his thought: the fight against injustices and oppression following the examples of the Shi'a Imams, the obligation to perform the Friday Prayer, frequent references to Mahdism and similar millenarian topic, the denunciation of clerics colluded with oppressive regimes, even if these topics were more openly discussed later on, at the end of 1998 – beginning of 1999.⁸³² These first sermons also point to the fact that attending Friday prayers is an obligation for Muslims, and the Regime's reports registering these sermons also notice since the beginning that they do not bless Saddam's name during the sermons ([See document n. 17](#))

Initially, Sadr's representatives were relatively free to choose the topics for their Friday sermons. As the phenomenon grew, precise guidelines started to arrive from the Friday Prayer Commission in Najaf, created in late 1997, and through Sadr's representatives. Following Sadr's orders, the Commission dictated the first part of the sermon, which had to be read in all mosques. As for the second half of the sermon, the Commission indicated the main themes decided by Sadr, but the imams had the liberty to decide how to spread these ideas, adapting them to their own contexts.⁸³³

The decision to start the Prayers in Madina Saddam before starting them also in Kufa was taken since the Madina had become, in the years between 1992 and 1996, a Sadrist stronghold, as we have seen; thus, if anything should have happened, like a Regime's reaction to such an event and a gathering of such proportion, there was a substantial number

⁸³⁰ BRCC 01_3560_0000_0067 (12/12/97).

⁸³¹ BRCC 01_3560_0000_0067, 0069 (05/12/97). BRCC 01_3560_0000_0192, 0193, 0194 (24/10/97) (31/10/97). BRCC 01_3560_0000_0203 (24/10/97).

⁸³² BRCC 01_3560_0000_0192, 0193, 0194 (24/10/97).

⁸³³ Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024). Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024).

of Sadrists ready to defend themselves.⁸³⁴ These considerations, apart from confirming Madina Saddam as a Sadrist center, also point to the fact that Sadr knew that he and his movement were starting to step out of the boundaries set by the Regime, and knowing this, they braced for a reaction. This reflection would further highlight that Sadr and probably his closest advisors were perfectly conscious of the delicate play they were conducting with the Regime, balancing between accepted actions in line with the Regime's interests and rebellious acts intended to create an opposition movement.⁸³⁵

Many of Sadr's supporters and representatives interviewed claim that the Sadrist movement in 1997 – 1998 could take control of many mosques around Iraq and perform the prayers because the Regime was too weak to control all the mosques and too weak to stop the prayers.⁸³⁶ It could only try to disrupt them occasionally but without decisive action due to the mass of Sadr's followers and the scarce number of Ba'athist agents. This narrative tried to highlight Sadrist power during the 1990s and their opposition to the Regime. Nevertheless, as we highlighted in the previous chapter when discussing the Sadrists taking control of mosques across Iraq, the Regime had the capability of crushing the movement if it wanted, as the February-March 1999 events will show. Instead, the Regime decided to observe the prayers and see if they could also be used to its advantage, as it is testified in Regime reports on the prayer and as it had probably done with other activities by the Sadrists.

Furthermore, in one of the first reports on the Friday gatherings of October 1997, we find a section of analysis of the phenomenon elaborated by the local Ba'ath Party branch. The party's officers noticed the strong growth of this phenomenon and the damage it was doing to the party's reputation and presence in Madina Saddam. They also state that some people participating in these gatherings are probably going only because they thought the party was organizing them. The Ba'ath members also comment on one of the preacher's sermons, saying that he is declaring his opposition to division in Iraqi society but that, in fact, he is achieving the opposite. They theorize that these gatherings are a tool to reach some

⁸³⁴ Interview with Hajj Q. K., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).

⁸³⁵ Sadr also explained his relationship with the Regime in the "Hannaneh Interview." He proposed quite an intricate theory according to which the Regime does not repress him and his followers as this would have made him look like a Regime's collaborators. Thus, by not repressing Sadr, the Regime is actually supporting Sistani, making him look like an opponent of the Regime, thus gaining the sympathy of Iraqis. Kadhem (2013). *The Hawza under Siege*, pp. 64 – 66. In another, less complicated, assessment of his relationship with the Regime, Sadr states that *the Regime supports and sponsors Shiite religious manifestations, and it is sympathetic to us as long as we do not interfere in politics*. Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza under Siege*, p. 43. al-Šadr (2013). *Mawā'it wa Liqā'āt Ayah Allah al- 'Uzmā al-Sayyid al-Šahīd Muḥammad al-Šadr*, pp. 38 – 40.

⁸³⁶ Interview with Hajj Q., Baghdad (24/02/2024). Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024). Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024).

still unknown goal and are political activities polarizing the youth. They suggest observing this phenomenon and trying to manipulate and use it as a weapon against the Americans and for the nation's good, further supporting the idea that many of the Sadrists' "conquests" were actually concessions by the Regime.⁸³⁷ Interestingly, this first analysis of the phenomenon did not connect it directly with Sadr, as other reports did, and the fact that they approached these prayers and the people organizing it was an unknown organization. These considerations might point to the fact that, if there was some sort of policy of letting Sadr and his followers have more space to maneuver than other religious men by the Regime, this policy was not widely known throughout the Ba'ath Party structure, but maybe only by the Central Command. It is also surprising that the agents compiling the report did not immediately make the connection with the Sadrist movement, which had, at this point, been active for some years. This information might point to the fact that the Sadrist network was still quite informal and undetected in 1997 by the Regime.

Nevertheless, the attitude in the report of wanting to use this phenomenon to further the Regime's objectives supports the idea that the Regime was interested in giving some space to these phenomena in that period, if not Sadrism in particular. Also, according to al-Simri, the mass movement that emerged through the Friday prayer gatherings surprised the Regime.⁸³⁸ The approach of this report to the movement is surprising considering the extensive mapping of the Iraqi religious environment that the Ba'ath had done during the 1980s and 1990s, as highlighted by Helfont.

The trial of prayers held by Sadr's representatives continued for all of 1997 and the first few months of 1998, expanding from Madina al-Sadr to other locations in Iraq.⁸³⁹ The order to start the prayers in these locations was either brought by the *wukala'* or other people who went back and forth from their hometowns to Najaf.⁸⁴⁰ The gatherings remained constant, with reports for the prayers of October 31, 1997,⁸⁴¹ November 7, 1997, November 21, the 28th, and later on the 5th, the 12th, and the 19th of December 1997.⁸⁴²

⁸³⁷ BRCC 01_3560_0000_0192, 0193, 0194 (24/10/97).

⁸³⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

⁸³⁹ Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024). Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024).

⁸⁴⁰ Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024).

⁸⁴¹ BRCC 01_3560_0000_0294 (05/11/97).

⁸⁴² BRCC 01_3560_0000_0294 (05/11/97). BRCC 01_3560_0000_0184 (15/11/97). BRCC 01_3560_0000_0088 (27/11/97). BRCC 01_3560_0000_0091, 0092 (27/11/97). BRCC 01_3560_0000_0071 (10/12/97). BRCC 01_3560_0000_0067 (12/12/97). BRCC 01_3560_0000_0010 (21/12/97). BRCC 01_3560_0000_0005 (27/12/97).

The local Ba'ath Commands regularly reported on these activities, collecting information such as the number of worshipers, the content of the sermons, and other similar information. Such precise reports meant that the Regime had his agents attend these meetings regularly and closely monitor the movement.

Sheikh S. was sent to Basra to lead the prayer. Initially, in November 1997, 30 imams were leading Friday Prayers; then, the number slowly mounted to 70. Sheikh Saleh al-Jaza'iri and Sheikh Ahmad al-Malaki were sent to Basra. Sheikh Hussein al-Muhammadawi was sent to al-Ammara. Sheikh Awas al-Khfaji and Sheikh Asa'ad al-Nasiri were sent to Nasiriyya. In Baghdad, there were Sayyid A., Sheikh H. Sawa'idi, Sayyid Bashir Y. M., Sheikh Ali al-Ka'abi, Sheikh Aytham al-Zayidi and Sayyid Abd al-Hadi al-Shawqi. Sayyid Muhammad al-Safi and Sheikh Muhammad al-Nu'mani were sent to Kut.⁸⁴³ Sheikh Nadir al-Quraishi was sent to al-Nu'maniyya in the first place. Then, the representative in Nu'maniyya became Sheikh K. in late October 1997.⁸⁴⁴ Sheikh G. was sent to lead the prayer in the Great Mosque of Iskandariyeh province of Hilla.⁸⁴⁵ Sheikh Ali al-Sahlanani was the Imam for the prayer in al-Shatra, in the province of Dhi Qar.⁸⁴⁶

The number of worshipers is also relatively constant or even growing. Thirty thousand people attended the Prayer on October 31 at the al-Muhsin Mosque. Four thousand people participated in the prayer at the al-Rasul Mosque on November 7.⁸⁴⁷ On the same day, 35,000 people participated in the prayer at the Mosque of al-Muhsin.⁸⁴⁸ On November 21, we see 5,000 worshipers in the al-Muhsin Mosques, again primarily young and coming from the area of the Mosque, Madinah Saddam, and from other areas of Baghdad.⁸⁴⁹ On November 28, we find 25,000 worshipers in the al-Muhsin.⁸⁵⁰ At the al-Rasul Mosque on the same day, we find 5,500 worshipers at the prayer.⁸⁵¹ On December 19, in the al-Muhsin Mosque, we find 20,000 young worshipers for the first sermon and 6,500 at the al-Rasul Mosque, all coming from the neighborhood or the close areas, such as Rusafa (al-Ruṣāfah).⁸⁵² In late October, in al-Nu'maniyya, we found 400 worshipers, and between 500 and 1000 worshipers

⁸⁴³ Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).

⁸⁴⁴ Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024). Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

⁸⁴⁵ Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

⁸⁴⁶ Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁸⁴⁷ BRCC 01_3560_0000_0166 (15/11/97).

⁸⁴⁸ BRCC 01_3560_0000_0166 (15/11/97).

⁸⁴⁹ BRCC 01_3560_0000_0088 (27/11/97). BRCC 01_3560_0000_0091, 0092 (27/11/97).

⁸⁵⁰ BRCC 01_3560_0000_0071 (10/12/97).

⁸⁵¹ Ibid.

⁸⁵² BRCC 01_3560_0000_0005 (27/12/97).

were found in Iskandariyeh throughout the last months of 1997.⁸⁵³ In Kadhimiyeh, for the first prayer on October 24, 1997, 500 people showed up. The number increased during 1998, reaching 3.000 on November 27, 1998.⁸⁵⁴ Iraqis saw Sadr as reviving religion in Iraq through Prayers, and this attracted many to these celebrations across Iraq.⁸⁵⁵

Some of the Ba'ath documents also report the sermons' contents on these occasions. For instance, two sermons were reported for the Prayer of November 28 in the al-Muhsin Mosque and the al-Rasul Mosque.

In the first Mosque, the sermon was delivered by Sayyid Abd al-Hadi al-Shawki ('Abd al-Hādī al-Šawkī) and focused on the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the reality and hardship of UN sanctions on Iraq, even though in the sermon are labeled as American Sanctions.⁸⁵⁶ The address in the al-Rasul Mosque is given by Sheikh Abd al-Hamid Zamil al-Sadi ('Abd al-Ḥamīd Zāmil al-Sā'dī) and focused on the commemorations for the death of Imam Musa al-Kadhim (Mūsā al-Kāẓimī), and narrating his life and moral values and how he faced difficulties without losing his moral rectitude. He then talked about the Isra' (Isrā') and Mi'raj (Mi'rāj). Finally, he focused on how young people should follow the example and the morals of the Prophet Muhammad.⁸⁵⁷

On December 19, at the al-Muhsin Mosque, the preacher Sayyid Hadi Harz Falahi al-Musawi (Hādī Ḥarz Falāḥī al-Mūsawī)⁸⁵⁸ gave a sermon speaking about different topics, both social and religious, and connecting the two fields. Apart from showing solid signs of devotion, common to most of these addresses, like calling on worshipers to venerate the Prophet Muhammad, he also focused on themes directly connected to current events. For instance, he reminds the participants how prayer is an obligation for Muslims, quoting Imam Ali to corroborate his stance. He then also brought up the topic of the return of Imam Mahdi, which is central to Muhammad al-Sadr's thought, and how his return would bring an end to all the enemies of Islam. The preacher then moves into more social topics and condemns the habits of women not wearing the veil and wearing clothes considered not modest enough. The other sermon, given on the same day at the al-Rasul Mosque, was led by Sheikh Abd al-Hamid Zamil al-Sadi. It was much shorter, focusing on the devotion to Imam Ali and his

⁸⁵³ Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

⁸⁵⁴ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024). Sayyid Hazem's statement is confirmed by Regime reports ([See document n. 17](#)).

⁸⁵⁵ Interview with Sayyid K. H., Najaf (04/03/2024).

⁸⁵⁶ BRCC 01_3560_0000_0071 (10/12/97).

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁸ In the report, it is specified that he is giving the sermon at the place of Sayyid Abd al-Hadi al-Shawki as if the latter were the usual preacher of the al-Muhsin Mosque.

sons, Hussain and Hasan. The preacher also focused on telling the life of Imam Mahdi, returning once again to this topic and narrating how he was born in the middle of the month of the Islamic calendar of Sha'aban and how his return would fill the Earth with justice and equality.⁸⁵⁹ In general, the prayers, according to Sheikh G., dealt with social issues, such as the education of the children, respect, safety and chastity and morality of women, the relationship between the Hawza and society, that had to be direct and central to Iraqi social life, and finally, attacks against Israel, the US, described as enemies of humanity.⁸⁶⁰

Such sermons were still in line with the Regime's interests, which we have highlighted in previous sections, and this is probably why the prayers were allowed for almost a year and a half; also, the only political topics that were discussed in the sermons were attacks to the US and Israel, so permitted by the Ba'ath Regime.⁸⁶¹

These first reports help us understand the initial stages of implementing the Friday Prayer from the Regime's perspective. They provide us with essential information on the development of Sadrism at that point, its geographical extension, the themes dealt with during the sermons, some names of Muhammad al-Sadr's representatives, and other precious information. They help us reconstruct the development of Sadrism by giving us an idea of why people were attracted to this movement and how many were going to the gatherings, allowing us to start to see it on a map and thus visualize this network.⁸⁶² Indeed, these reports are also essential for observing and analyzing the creation of the Sadrist ideology, looking at how Sadr's ideas were transmitted from his more scholarly works, which we explored in the previous chapter, to his sermons and then to the sermons of his representatives.⁸⁶³ Interviews with Sadr's representatives also give us a well-rounded perspective on this central moment of the development of the movement.

Interestingly, many of these first reports are handwritten, and only some are typed. These choices contrast with the later approach to prayer-gathering reports that are all typed.

⁸⁵⁹ BRCC 01_3560_0000_0005 (27/12/97).

⁸⁶⁰ Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024).

⁸⁶¹ Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁸⁶² Of course, not all the people attending the prayers are to be counted exactly as part of the Sadrist Movement, also because, as we are starting to see, the movement was much more a loose current of ideas and conception of society and ideas about what were the main problems of Iraq and how they could be solved and a circle of people tied to Muhammad al-Sadr by the ties of the Shi'a religious institutions, more than a structured Movement.

⁸⁶³ Considering that the sermons of his representatives might have started before his own, he probably transmitted and discussed his ideas in other circumstances. Also, yet another passage to observe in this diffusion of ideas is the reception and re-elaboration by the crowds gathered to listen to Sadr's and his representatives' sermons. This following passage can be accomplished only by interviewing people present then and indeed not through the Ba'ath Party Archive.

This change in the party's attitude might indicate a growth in the party's interest and worry about the phenomenon that was not present at this time. From the archive, we gather the impression that typed reports are the ones that receive more attention, moving from their initial form of handwritten documents to the stage of typed documents and moving from the local section that produced them to central commands. The reports we find occasionally provide some analysis of the phenomenon (Zāhirah) and some strategic suggestions for confronting it, as we highlighted.⁸⁶⁴

3.1.2 April 1998: The Expansion of the Friday Prayer.

After the fall of 1997, the prayers continued through 1998. Even though we have recordings, interviews, and a printed collection of Sadr's sermons starting in April 1998 from the Ba'ath party Archive, we can only gather reports on Friday Prayers from the late summer of 1998 onward, apart from those from late 1997. Nevertheless, we can affirm that the prayers of Sadr's representative continued throughout the year and that the Regime's reports are either missing or we could not find them in the vast number of documents in the archive.

In this period, from the first mosques reported in the last months of 1997, the prayer spread to even more locations.⁸⁶⁵ However, the most critical development of this period was the beginning of the Friday prayer in the Great Mosque of Kufa,⁸⁶⁶ led by Muhammad al-Sadr, on April 17, 1998 (19 Dhu al-Hijja 1418), the day after 'Aīd al-Ġadīr, the anniversary of the Prophet's appointment of Imam Ali as his successor for the imamate and the caliphate. The prayers led by Sadr would go on until February 19, 1999 ([See picture n. 25](#)).⁸⁶⁷ Sadr had probably considered that it was a step that had to be taken, as many of his followers were asking for it, and that was relatively safe, given both the strength of his following and the

⁸⁶⁴ BRCC 01_3560_0000_0190 (08/11/97).

⁸⁶⁵ Sadristes even reached Kirkuk in northern Iraq, while their stronghold was usually in central and southern Iraq. They might have had access to Kirkuk as the Regime was trying to Arabize the region and thus did not take any action against Sadristes expanding so far from their base. Conversation with Professor David Patel. al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lil-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 446. Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, pp. 332, 333. al-Sīmri (2019) *Dawr al-Marḡa 'iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, pp. 45 - 52. Al-Simri supports the idea that worshipers in al-Sadr's Friday prayers were coming from different sects and were not only Shi'a.

⁸⁶⁶ Kufa has a central place in Shi'a history and the fact that Sadr delivers his sermons from the Great Mosque of Kufa is symbolically very relevant for Shi'a as the city was the seat of Ali's caliphate and where his grave is located. This relevance is also recognized and highlighted by Sadr in his first sermon: *This [Kufa] is the capital of the Mahdi, may God's peace be upon him. [...] We are speaking in a place where the Commander of the Faithful [Ali], peace be upon him, delivered a sermon*. al-Ṣadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, p. 12.

⁸⁶⁷ The prayer was called for the first time on the 15th of Ša'abān, the date of birth of the Mahdi. al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lil-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, pp. 444, 450.

lack of a decisive reaction by the Regime's side. During these prayers, Sadr delivered 45 sermons, conveying directly his ideas to his followers and attracting huge crowds.⁸⁶⁸ The addresses were delivered in a mix of standard Arabic and colloquial Iraqi dialect to highlight his vicinity to people's daily life and preoccupation, which, as we previously pointed out, was one of Sadr's characteristic traits that helped him attract so many followers. The ability to transmit his ideas in a simple language, filling the gap with the Iraqi population like other less charismatic clerics could not do, gave Sadr immense popularity.⁸⁶⁹ He would climb on the podium in the Great Mosque of Kufa to deliver his sermons clad in his shroud (*kafn*), symbolically ready for martyrdom for Islam, inspiring the crowds.⁸⁷⁰

His representatives soon imitated him. Sheikh S. in Basra also started to wear a shroud and keep a sword on his pulpit during his sermons to symbolize his readiness for martyrdom and his will to fight ([See pictures n. 26, 27, 28](#)). During these prayers, Sadr delivered long speeches touching on religious and social issues. Their structure was somewhat set, as a long invocation to God, the Prophet Muhammad, and his family opened them. In the rest of his speech, Sadr brought up social issues, criticizing hawza for their quietism and detachment from Iraqi society. In the last few months of 1998 and at the beginning of 1999, Sadr also started attacking the Regime for its corruption and bad administration of the country, leading to a new and last stage of the development of the Friday prayers.

This moment marked the peak of the expansion of the Sadrist Movement in the 1990s.

Many Sadrists started going to Kufa every Friday to attend the prayer with Sadr himself.⁸⁷¹ Some of them attended almost all prayers before Sadr started praying in Kufa and, then, all Sadr's prayers until his death, participating in 70 Friday prayers.⁸⁷² While Sadr's prayers attracted many followers, his representatives' prayers continued, as we pointed out. The number of *wukala'* got to 100, reaching even more people and swelling worshipers' numbers.⁸⁷³ In Baghdad, there were various mosques where prayer took place.

⁸⁶⁸ For our analysis, we used the transcription of Sadr's Sermons. Their recordings and videos are also present, but the audio quality makes it very difficult for a non-native speaker to understand the contents of the Sermons. The Sermon's recordings can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uzb3e6wSl68&list=PLPQ2IYVELMJzcaRepqwFkXp696DF-mIji&ab_channel=%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%8A-Al-Draji.

⁸⁶⁹ al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 451. al-Sīmri (2019) *Dawr al-Marḡa 'iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, pp. 91, 92. al-Ṣadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma 'ah*, p. 145. al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 449.

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⁸⁷¹ Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024).

⁸⁷² Ibid.

⁸⁷³ Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

In Kadhimiyye, it was led by Sayyid A., as we have stated. There was another mosque where Sheikh Muntazar al-Khasarji was the preacher, and Ali al-Ka'abi was one of Sadr's agents in Mainda Saddam.⁸⁷⁴ Sayyid A. even organised a joint prayer in the al-Abbas Mosque with a Sunni Imam, Sheikh Harith, to show that there was no division between the two sects and preached that there was no difference between them.⁸⁷⁵ Sheikh G. continued to lead the prayer in Iskandariyyeh, spending the week in Najaf, going on Wednesday night to Baghdad and Friday early morning to Iskandariyyeh to lead the prayer.⁸⁷⁶ Sheikh Abd al-Hussein Taher was even sent to the province of Anbar to gather the few Shi'a living there and bring them Sadr's message. He would go to Anbar every Friday with two other people, dodging checkpoints by the Regime.⁸⁷⁷

As we have seen, the representatives continued to deliver their sermons in a more structured way than before, receiving directions from Sadr's office in Najaf. Nevertheless, the representatives were left some liberty in choosing the topic and especially how to present it. For this reason, the sermon topics slightly varied from mosque to mosque, while some shared subjects were connected to the events happening at that moment and to what Sadr was preaching in his sermons in Kufa.⁸⁷⁸

A characteristic remarked by the Ba'ath officers compiling the report on the Friday Prayer on August 14, 1998, at the Hussainiyyah of the Muhsin al-Hakim (Muḥsin al-Ḥakīm) mosque is that the sermons were more political than religious, signaling thus the beginning of a shift from the primarily religious topics of the 1997/early 1998 sermons that we previously analyzed.⁸⁷⁹ Interestingly, Sadrist insist on the opposite point, stating that they only dealt with religious topics, apart from attacks on the US, Israel, and, at the end of 1998 and beginning of 1999, attacks on the "Šayṭān," i.e., the Iraqi Regime, of which we shall talk more in-depth further on.⁸⁸⁰ This self-perception as religious activists, or just religious people, is perfectly in line with other Islamist groups that see themselves as performing the duties of Muslims without a specific political (siyāsī) connotation that would be considered

⁸⁷⁴ Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

⁸⁷⁵ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyyah (19/06/2024). He supported these ideas in a sermon in August 1998.

⁸⁷⁶ Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

⁸⁷⁷ Interview with Sheikh T., Baghdad (24/02/2024).

⁸⁷⁸ By looking at the representatives' sermons reported in the Ba'ath Party archives and Sadr's sermons, it is interesting to find many correspondences concerning the topics. This confirms the Movement's structure and how sermons were prepared in Najaf and then distributed to all representatives by the commission for the Friday prayers.

⁸⁷⁹ BRCC 01_2823_0001_0041 (14/08/98).

⁸⁸⁰ Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

derogatory and reductive compared to the all-comprehensive (šumūlī) character of Islam. Furthermore, in another prayer gathering, the Ba'ath officials noticed that not all the people going seemed interested in the religious aspects of these gatherings while showing interest in its political side.⁸⁸¹ This phenomenon might be a symptom of a general interest of the Iraqi population in any form of political debate and activity. One of Sadr's representatives even states that Friday prayer represented a breath of fresh air for him.⁸⁸² This sensation might help explain the rise in popularity of the Sadrists as one of the few, if not the only group, providing some kind of public political activities and space for debating contemporary political events outside the Regime's organized activities, at least apparently.

As a matter of fact, current political events were a central topic of these sermons. The US and Great Britain's bombardments on Iraq were often mentioned, condemning them, cursing their perpetrators and the supposed accomplices of these attacks, such as Israel, Kuwait, and the Saudis, that, instead of protecting Islam, preferred to ally themselves with infidels for profit.⁸⁸³ The critiques also concerned British colonial history and what was perceived as contemporary US colonial behavior.⁸⁸⁴ Sadr, in his sermon in Kufa on December 15, 1998, remarked that after the fall of the Soviet Union, the US felt and behaved like they could do whatever they wanted without consequences, using their military might and economic power.⁸⁸⁵ This criticism did not spare the Arab League, which did not intervene in support of Iraq against the US or the British.⁸⁸⁶ The same went for the Sheikh of al-Azhar, who was condemned for not saying anything in support of Iraq and Iraqis, who were considered martyrs and the modern muhajirun (muhāğirūn).⁸⁸⁷ The widespread idea among preachers and worshipers was that these bombardments were attacks and threats not only to Iraq and Iraqis but also to Muslims and Islam in general.⁸⁸⁸ Thus, solidarity was expected from the Arab and Muslim brothers. Not receiving it spread the idea of a conspiracy

⁸⁸¹ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0910 (22/12/98).

⁸⁸² Interview with Sheikh H. R., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

⁸⁸³ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0854 (05/02/99). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0857 (08/02/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0672 (04/02/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0773 (22/12/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0780 (07/01/99). Another strong accusation made against the Saudis was based on the destruction of the tombs of the Prophet Muhammad and his family members in Madina.

BRCC 01_3759_0002_0792 (25/12/98). BRCC 01_2348_0000_0582 (04/02/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0847 (14/01/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0727, 0728 (25/02/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0635, 0636 (05/02/99).

⁸⁸⁴ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0670 (21/01/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0673, 0674 (18/2/99).

⁸⁸⁵ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0912 (06/01/99).

⁸⁸⁶ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0635, 0636 (05/02/99).

⁸⁸⁷ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0635, 0636 (05/02/99).

⁸⁸⁸ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0776 (27/12/98).

against Iraq, supported in particular by the aforementioned Arab countries and maneuvered by the Israelis.

These attacks were particularly mentioned during December 1998 and January 1999, when Operation Desert Fox took place (16-19th December 1998) and right after that.⁸⁸⁹ Preachers also remarked on the courage of the most hit locations in Iraq, like Basra or Jumhuriyyah (Ġumhūriyyah) and Abi al-Khasib (Abī al-Ḥaṣīb).⁸⁹⁰ They called for blessings on the Iraqi Martyrs, reading the Surah al-Fatihah (al-fātiḥah) on their souls. Another preacher, during the sermon on December 29, 1998, in the Mosque of al-Kabir (al-Kabīr), called for a jihad against the Americans and the Zionists.⁸⁹¹ Sayyid A. even called for the “Army of the Hawza” to attack Israel.⁸⁹²

The topic of the US and Great Britain’s attacks on Iraq was a sort of safe political topic to speak about, as the Regime welcomed any condemnation of these attacks. For this very reason, sometimes preachers did not mention these bombardments, probably to show their distance from the Regime’s propaganda that focused instead on the brutality of the attacks. This silence was, of course, noticed and registered by the Regime’s officials.⁸⁹³ On one occasion, a Ba’ath officer remarks that listening to Sadr’s sermon, one could think to be in a different country than Iraq for how detached from the events happening in the country the sermon was.⁸⁹⁴

Other political topics could not be approached so openly and had to be treated more carefully. In many sermons, we find references to Islamic history and figures and understand that the preacher used it as a parallel for the contemporary political situation. Sadr often quoted events from Islamic history in correspondence to the events’ anniversaries. For instance, when the Mahdi’s birthday occurred, he would dedicate two sermons to the Mahdi’s life and Occultation.⁸⁹⁵ Or to Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet and wife of Ali.⁸⁹⁶ The same would happen with Imam Hussain and his revolution and how this would continue

⁸⁸⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/jan/26/ianblack>.

⁸⁹⁰ BRCC 01_3751_0002 0635 - 0636 (05/02/99). Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024). He refers that Sadr thought that he had to mobilize the Iraqi masses to prepare them for the fall of the Iraqi Regime after the US attack.

⁸⁹¹ BRCC 01_3751_0002 0635, 0636 (05/02/99).

⁸⁹² Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024).

⁸⁹³ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0910 (22/12/98). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0670, 0673, 0674 (21/01/99) (18/02/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0727, 0728 (15-22/01/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0670, 0673, 0674 (21/01/99) (18/02/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0635, 0636 (05/02/99).

⁸⁹⁴ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0910 (22/12/99).

⁸⁹⁵ Sadr mentions these topics on the Twelfth Friday, first sermon; the Twelfth Friday, second sermon; the thirteenth Friday, first sermon; and also the Thirty-fourth Friday, first sermon. Ibid., pp. 146 – 166, 386 – 397.

⁸⁹⁶ See the Twenty-fourth Friday, the first sermon. Ibid., pp. 298 – 308.

until the day of return.⁸⁹⁷ He also vividly described the terrible situation faced by Imam Hussain and his followers in Karbala, probably trying to draw a parallelism between their sufferances and the situation of Iraqis in the 90s.⁸⁹⁸ Another instance of this usage of Islamic history is the comparison of the oppression lived by Imam Hussain at the hands of the Umayyads and the one experienced by Iraqi Shi'a at the hands of Saudis and Zionists.⁸⁹⁹ These ideas took such a firm root among Sadr's followers that one of them stated that by looking at Sadr, he saw Imam Hussein himself in all his glory.⁹⁰⁰ Sayyid A. also accused the four founders of the Sunni Juridical schools of being more ignorant than the Shi'a Imam Jawad, buried in Kadhimiyyah ([See document n. 18](#)).⁹⁰¹

Other preachers compared Kufa's resistance to al-Hajjaj (al-Ḥaḡḡaḡ Bin Yūsuf), the Umayyad governor of Iraq, and the caliph Mu'wiya (Mu'āwiyah) with the modern resistance of Kufa to Sadr's enemies. Accusations of the Abbasid caliphs for the killing of many Shi'a imams were a metaphor for the relationship between the Ba'ath Regime and the hawza and the many members of the latter killed by the former ([See document n. 19](#)).⁹⁰² Indeed, rumors spread in a sermon of some infiltrates among Muslims who wanted to kill Sadr as he was a threat to Israel. According to these rumors, these infiltrates were also in hawza.⁹⁰³ Sadr would be a threat as four million Muslims are praying behind him, as a foreign radio is said to have reported.⁹⁰⁴ The diffusion of these rumors shows how the idea of danger looming over Sadr was widespread among his followers and representatives. Finally, comparisons were often made between the current era and the time of the Jahiliyya (Ġāhiliyyah), before the advent of Islam, to exemplify the dire state of things in society.⁹⁰⁵

Political statements were also made by staying silent on specific topics. We already noticed that with the US and Great Britain's attacks on Iraq, but another critical subject in this regard was the mention of Saddam's name at the end of the Friday Prayer Sermon. In

⁸⁹⁷ Sadr mentions these topics on the Fifth Friday, the first sermon, the Sixth Friday, the second sermon, the Seventh Friday, and the first sermon. He dedicates three Friday sermons to Hussain's life: the Seventh, the Eight, and the Ninth. Ibid., pp. 54 – 64, 76 – 91, 98 – 124.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 91 – 98, 183 – 190.

⁸⁹⁹ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0847 (14/01/99).

⁹⁰⁰ Interview with M. K., Najaf (31/05 -01/06/2024).

⁹⁰¹ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyyeh (19/06/2024) – in a Sermon on October 1998.

⁹⁰² al-Sīmī (2019) *Dawr al-Marḡa'īyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 45. Sadr mentions these topics on the Fourth Friday, the first sermon, and the Eleventh Friday, the first sermon. al-Ṣadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, pp. 40 – 46, 135 – 141.

⁹⁰³ On the 29th of January 1999, Sadr also remarks that representatives from the hawza started giving out money to people, and he questions the true reasons behind that, probably implying that they started doing it just after the spread of his followers in the hope of diminishing his influence. BRCC 01_2974_0001_0858 (16/02/99).

⁹⁰⁴ BRCC 01_2348_0000_0552 (22/02/99)..

⁹⁰⁵ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0791 (02/02/99).

Islamic tradition, the ruler's name was mentioned and blessed during the sermon as a sign of acknowledgment of his rule, as we have seen. Not mentioning it could be taken as a sign of rebellion and an implicit declaration of the ruler's illegitimacy. Choosing to stay silent on this topic was the stance most preachers took and one of the main points of disappointment of Ba'ath officials when surveilling the Prayers.⁹⁰⁶

Curiously enough, some preachers did mention Saddam Hussain's name at the end of their sermons, especially when they were talking about bombardments on Iraq and how Iraqis should remain united to face this threat, take onto themselves the safety of Iraq and the spread of monotheism.⁹⁰⁷ We can not be sure of the reasons for the preachers' choice, but we can make some guesses. The first and most apparent is that these preachers were not part of the Sadrist network or, if they were, they were Regime infiltrates.⁹⁰⁸ We know there were infiltrates in the movement or, at least, that the Regime was trying to put his imams in Sadrist mosques since Sadr gave the order not to pray behind the Regime's agents.⁹⁰⁹ The second and less direct guess concerns the tightness of Sadr's network and the degree of liberty the preachers had in choosing what to discuss in their sermons. If they were more or less free to choose, as they were especially in the second sermon, maybe on the wave of patriotism, probably strongly influenced by the Regime's propaganda, following these bombardments, even these preachers fell prey to the idea that in these moments, Iraqis had to close ranks around their leader, against the more significant threat. These cases show how the Regime could also hope to use other Sadrist prayers to its advantage, mobilizing religious men to obtain support from the population.

Apart from using Islamic history events to compare with the current political situation, events or figures from this long tradition were often quoted to provide worshipers with examples to follow and models to imitate in connection with specific social issues.

⁹⁰⁶ BRCC 01_2821_0001_0437 (19/09/98). BRCC 01_2821_0001_0389 (09/09/98). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0672 (04/02/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0727, 0728 (25/02/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0776 (27/12/98). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0670 (21/01/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0673, 0674 (18/02/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0727, 0728 (25/02/99).

⁹⁰⁷ On one of these sermons, on the 29th of January 1999, Haydar al-Ghazi in the Mosque of al-Quraish even says that sermons should not spread lies like had happened in Nassiriyya, where one of the preachers had been arrested. BRCC 01_3751_0002_0670, 0673, 0674 (21/01/99) (18/02/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0727, 0728 (25/01/00). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0727, 0728 (25/02/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0635, 0636 (05/02/99).

⁹⁰⁸ Helfont (2018). *Compulsion in Religion*. P. 60.

⁹⁰⁹ al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 450. al-Jibouri (2020). *Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr*, pp. 142, 143. Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, pp. 327-330.

Preachers focus on adopting what they define as Islamic or religious morals and customs in society. For instance, they often quote the example of Zaynab or Fatimah as a pious woman whose model is to follow.⁹¹⁰ In this sense, a preacher named Ahmad al-Maliki (Aḥmad al-Mālīkī) in the Hussainiyyah Safiḥ al-Mariani (Safiḥ al-Mariyānī) on January 29, 1999, called for the imposition of the hijab on all female state employees and students. Similarly, he calls on fathers to impose the wearing of hijab on their female family members. He also says that schools should reward students wearing hijabs by giving them higher grades and that he is ready to provide hijabs to all the students in the neighborhood of al-Hayyaniyyeh, in Basra, which we have already pointed out as one of Sadrist's strongholds.⁹¹¹

On the same line, preachers also widely spoke of the halal and the haram in Islam and condemned many aspects of what they defined as Western culture, infiltrating Iraqi society and corrupting it.⁹¹² Music should have been banned, according to many of these preachers, and the same went for shops selling records, which had to be pushed out of Shi'a neighborhoods.⁹¹³ Taxi-playing music should not be used, and singers and songwriters were to be declared infidels.⁹¹⁴ Again, Ahmad al-Maliki, during his sermon on January 29, 1999, stated that the tribal authority should implement this ban on music and record stores, showing again the importance of tribal authority in Iraqi society in the 1990s and its connection to Sadrist.⁹¹⁵ Sadr himself called for tribes to respect Islamic law, inviting scholars and his representatives to focus on tribal problems instead of ignoring them and try to find a solution that is, at the same time, Islamic and respects tribal law.⁹¹⁶ This criticism against clerics who

⁹¹⁰ BRCC 01_2821_0001_0441 (19/09/98). BRCC 01_2821_0001_0386 (24/09/98). BRCC 01_2821_0001_0389 (09/09/98). BRCC 01_2821_0001_0234 (18/10/98).

⁹¹¹ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0635, 0636 (05/02/99).

⁹¹² BRCC 01_2821_0001_0437 (19/09/99).

⁹¹³ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0635, 0636 (05/02/99).

⁹¹⁴ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0452 (06/03/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0455 (22/02/99).

⁹¹⁵ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0635, 0636 (05/02/99).

⁹¹⁶ *Now we have to opportunity to repent and apply the Shari'a to Tribal problems. As far as I understand these problems, there are two ways of solving them. The first method is for the tribe to gather and decide their laws in accordance with Islamic law. There should be no deviation from it, God forbid. Otherwise, the second method is to go back to the seminary and review every single problem in their laws and make them compliant with the Islamic legal system. This is possible as the Hawza and the maraj'ah are at the service of people, and it is their duty to find solutions for their problems, as they exist for that.* al-Ṣadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, pp. 267, 268.

Now, we call on the tribes and the heads of the tribes. Everybody knows that they apply their own legal system and traditions, and everybody knows that many of them are invalid and illegal in front of God Almighty. We do not want any believer and any Shi'a to commit any disobedience. Rather, we want the whole of society, and the clans, in particular, to follow the law of God and please him so that he can intercede for them. This can happen only through the application of His laws. Ibid., p. 265.

ignore tribal problems is again a reference to the fact that scholars must interest themselves in the everyday problems of believers.

Television and Western TV shows were also considered inappropriate and to be banned.⁹¹⁷ Especially during the Ramadan of 1998-1999 (December 19, 1998 – January 17, 1999), calls for this ban intensified. These programs were considered a central tool of the spread of Western costumes, and zina (zinà) (adultery) was seen as one of the main consequences of this spread.⁹¹⁸ Sayyid A. attacked the channel *Telfizīūn Šabāb* (the Youth Television) for its amoral contents. This attack was particularly problematic as the channel was run by Saddam's son, 'Uday, who called for A.'s arrest.⁹¹⁹

Another problem seen as an outcome of Western values diffusion and a primary factor in the spread of adultery was the contact between doctors and nurses with patients of different sexes.⁹²⁰ Sadr himself spoke of the mixing of sexes and the veiling of women, which he strongly favored.⁹²¹ Sayyid A., in a sermon on August 24, 1998, also attacked this practice and the intermingling of sexes in general.⁹²²

Furthermore, Sadr also condemns doctors selling medicines on the black market.⁹²³ Echoing him, Sayyid A. also attacked state employees who stole state properties, especially those in the Awqaf ministry ([See document n. 19](#)).⁹²⁴

Preachers also called for the ban of alcohol and shops selling it, pushing all sellers out of Shi'a areas.⁹²⁵ Finally, even barbers offering what were defined as Western haircuts had to be avoided.⁹²⁶

Nevertheless, the call to morality was not just about banning influences from Western culture. Preachers also called for donations of food and money to the poor and the orphans, especially during Ramadan.⁹²⁷ The call for internal solidarity within the movement and the community around it supported the Sadrist informal welfare system, which was entirely

⁹¹⁷ BRCC 01_2821_0001_0441 (19/01/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0831 (16/01/99).

⁹¹⁸ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0816, 0819, 0820 (22/01/99).

⁹¹⁹ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyyeh (19/06/2024).

⁹²⁰ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0858 (16/02/99).

⁹²¹ al-Šadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, pp. 277 – 285.

⁹²² Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyyeh (19/02/2024).

⁹²³ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0858 (16/02/99). Interview with M. K., Najaf (31/05 – 01/06/2024).

⁹²⁴ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyyeh (19/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024). In the document we referred to, a sermon by Sayyid A., accusations to the Ministry of Religious Affairs are not so clear but more veiled. This is in line with the fact that the sermon is dated July 1998, and the confrontation with the Regime is not yet totally open. His behavior toward the Ministry in the sermon is defined as a "doubtful" one.

⁹²⁵ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0635, 0636 (05/02/99). Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyyah (19/06/2024).

⁹²⁶ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0635, 0636 (05/02/99).

⁹²⁷ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0727, 0728 (25/02/99).

based on donations and religious taxes. They also focused on the virtues and importance of fasting and the centrality for Muslims of the inner struggle with their flaws, explaining the difference between minor and major jihad.⁹²⁸ Preachers also called for the end of divisions between Muslims, stating that the differences between Sunni and Shi'a were just differences between *maḏāhib* (pl. of *maḏahab*).⁹²⁹

Moral examples were also provided by referring to figures such as Imam Ali, Imam Hussain, or the Prophet Muhammad.⁹³⁰ Influential Imams, such as Ja'afar al-Sadiq (Ja'afar al-Ṣādiq), were quoted, providing examples of their vast scholarly knowledge and role in forming Shi'a jurisprudence and as role models for students who should also devote their studies to religious topics such as the commemoration of Eid al-Ghadir (ʿAīd al-Ġadīr).⁹³¹ Imam Hussain's revolution is often quoted as an example of a Shi'a Imam fighting against oppression.⁹³² The same was done with Imam Ali's sacrifice.⁹³³ The piousness of these characters was also often highlighted. The teachings of Imam Ali concerning the poor, the orphans, the valuable work for the Muslim community, and the importance of communal prayer are quoted. Of course, the virtues of Ali and Prophet Muhammad are also exalted. Often, these references are made at specific times, such as on the anniversary of Imam Ali's death or the month of Muharram and the like.

Another central religious topic of Sadr's sermons is the return of the Mahdi, of course. Invocations for his quick return are often made.⁹³⁴ Sadr called on Hussain's example, inciting his listeners to be ready to sacrifice for Islam and fight injustice, as these are two conditions for the Mahdi's return.⁹³⁵ This topic is one of the most important in Sadr's thought, and he mentions it frequently. He focuses on the conditions we already highlighted regarding the Mahdi's return and the possibility of accelerating this return.⁹³⁶ In speaking

⁹²⁸ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0781 (20/12/98). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0910 (22/12/98). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0792 (25/12/98). BRCC 01_2348_0000_0582 (04/02/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0670 (21/01/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0831 (16/01/99).

⁹²⁹ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0840, 0844 (17/01/99).

⁹³⁰ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0772 (17/02/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0462 (06/03/99).

⁹³¹ BRCC 01_2821_0001_0441 (19/09/99). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0910 (22/12/98). BRCC 01_2821_0001_0237 (06/10/98). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0847 (14/01/99). BRCC 01_2348_0000_0618 (01/01/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0831 (16/01/99).

⁹³² BRCC 01_3751_0002_0635, 0636 (05/02/99).

⁹³³ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0840, 0844 (17/01/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0670 (21/01/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0670 (21/01/99).

⁹³⁴ BRCC 01_3757_0001_0773 (22/12/98). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0858 (16/02/99).

⁹³⁵ al-Ṣadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, 83 – 91.

⁹³⁶ *If we find in every individual the feeling of the survival of the popular base and the Mahdi's loyalists, the wait for his return at every moment, the anticipation of his appearance every day, and the study of all details of religion, then the Mahdi's return is close. We must notice that there is no contradiction between the constant*

about the Mahdi, Sadr also mentions that he, the Imam, is the only one able to claim definitive guardianship, highlighting once again how the *wilaya* of the clerics is just transitory or a preparation for the Mahdi's reign.⁹³⁷

Preachers also call on single believers to learn about the Mahdi, as knowledge about him is crucial in preparing the ground for his return. They also call on worshipers to act for his return, obeying God's laws and following Imams' and prophets' guidance. Justice has to be implemented to prepare and anticipate his return. The Mahdi's return could happen at any moment, so Muslims have to be ready for it. This message is present in Islam and before Islam, as humanity has always been waiting for the Mahdi's return. Nevertheless, Muslims, in particular, are entrusted with preparing for his return.⁹³⁸ In such a way, preachers spread Sadr's work on the Mahdi more comprehensibly than scholarly books could.

The calls for justice to anticipate the Mahdi's return translate into concrete claims preachers made during their sermons. Protests for the lack of electricity are often made.⁹³⁹ Complaints about the food quality in the country are also made, and there are suspicions that somebody is speculating about it.⁹⁴⁰

The consciousness of the lack of welfare services brings the preachers to call for creating alternative institutions to support the worshipers' community, calling people to participate in those alternative institutions we explored in the previous chapter. Preachers asked for alms during the Prayers to distribute among the poor.⁹⁴¹ In the same way, in one instance, Ali al-Ka'abi ('Alī al-Ka'abī), on January 1, 1999, at the al-Muhsin Mosque, asked worshipers to help restore the Mosque.⁹⁴² Another preacher, while calling for more people to join the prayer, also asked them to bring a microphone and a speaker so that, even with many people, everybody could hear the sermon. Finally, al-Ka'abi also called for establishing Sharia courts in Kadhimiyah (Kāḍimiyah) to administer justice.⁹⁴³ Sadr's

attempt to anticipate the Mahdi's return and the constant wait and the condition that only God can give permission to the Mahdi to return. Ibid., p. 396.

⁹³⁷ *He [the Mahdi] has the formative guardianship (al-wilāyyah al-takwīniyyah) worldwide, just like his forefathers. If he had not existed, then the guardianship would have stopped, God forbid. We are only negligent sinners, and we can not aspire to guardianship as it is far above our understanding and comprehension. Ibid., p. 502.*

⁹³⁸ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0752, 0755 (15/02/99).

⁹³⁹ BRCC 01_2821_0001_0386 (24/09/98). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0904 (25/01/99). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0907 (17/01/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0727, 0728 (25/02/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0635, 0636 (05/02/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0462 (06/03/99).

⁹⁴⁰ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0816, 0819, 0820 (22/01/99).

⁹⁴¹ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0670, 0673, 0674 (21/01/99) (18/02/99).

⁹⁴² BRCC 01_3759_0002_0847 (14/01/99).

⁹⁴³ BRCC 01_2823_0001_0041 (14/08/98). BRCC 01_2821_0001_0234 (18/10/98).

preacher in Kadhimiyah, Sayyid A., also called people to the Shairiatic courts to avoid the state ones, as seen in the Regime's report on one of his sermons ([See document n. 18](#)).⁹⁴⁴ The prayer was also a way of spreading Sadr's fatawa on particular topics, such as the one that ruled smoking as something that did not break the fast in Ramadan.⁹⁴⁵

These are signs that the community created by the spread of the Sadrist network during 1992 – 1996 was now an established presence in the country and that the Friday Prayers helped cement. This process created a solidarity network that partially substituted the state welfare system, which was not working anymore or did not reach this community.

In this sense, many preachers state that Sadr reopened the hawza after 17 years of inactivity, restoring its role as an institution with deep ties with the Shi'a community and a central social role.⁹⁴⁶ The timelapse of 17 years is probably chosen from the death of Muhammad al-Sadr's cousin, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr), who was assassinated by the Ba'ath Regime for his activism in 1980.

In his sermons, Sadr also calls believers to obey the clerics and the marja'iyya.⁹⁴⁷ This attitude is interesting when read along with his criticism of clerics. These two elements of Sadr's discourse show that, on the one hand, he criticized the clerics for their behavior, such as their detachment from the community, political inactivity, and a certain despise of lay believers. However, on the other hand, the call for obedience to the marja'iyya shows that he was not willing to destroy this institution but only to reform it. He probably also called for compliance with the marja'iyya as he was part of this institution, and a certain degree of his authority derived from being part of this institution.

Nevertheless, Sadr's criticism against clerics is severe. He criticized clerics more than once for not attending the Friday prayer and said that scholars always choose another prayer and avoid the communal one on Fridays.⁹⁴⁸ He also called on other scholars to come and lead the Friday prayer at his place if they did not want to pray behind him.⁹⁴⁹ Baṣīr al-Nağafī and Sai'īd al-Ḥakīm (1936 – 2021) and other 'ulama forbade their followers from joining

⁹⁴⁴ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyah (19/06/2024).

⁹⁴⁵ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0792 (25/12/98). BRCC 01_2348_0000_0582 (04/02/99). BRCC 01_2348_0000_0618 (01/01/99).

⁹⁴⁶ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0773 (22/12/98). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0776 (27/12/98).

⁹⁴⁷ *And I make this clear to the public, to the Shiites, may God reward them with the best reward for those who do good, they should not act, or say a word, except with the permission of the honorable maraj'ah.* al-Ṣadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, pp. 11, 69 – 76, 83 – 91, 124 – 132, 406 – 416.

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 14 – 18. Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

⁹⁴⁹ al-Ṣadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, pp. 250 – 257.

Sadr's Friday prayers.⁹⁵⁰ Even if we could discuss the sincerity of Sadr's invitations, it was still a way of remarking on the scholars' quietism and highlighting his political activism and humility at the same time. Sadr also asked why scholars did not participate in the prayer that could be useful for the community, thus choosing not to do what was in the interest of their community.⁹⁵¹ The idea that the prayer helps the Shi'a community and enhances its interest is repeated several times.⁹⁵² Among the beneficial effects of the Friday prayer, Sadr also quotes education. As we have seen during our analysis of the *Encyclopedia of the Mahdi*, the Ummah's education is central to preparing the ground for the Mahdi's return.⁹⁵³ Al-Simri states that *prayer is central to Sadr's mobilization and helps raise awareness of the Ummah (the Islamic community) regarding religion, the hawza, and the maraja'*.⁹⁵⁴

Sadr also criticized scholars for their distance from lay believers and their incapacity to speak a language the people would understand.⁹⁵⁵ Coherently with this criticism, very often, the topic of Sadr's sermons would be the everyday problems of believers, as we have seen.⁹⁵⁶ Sadr wondered why these issues should not worry the clerics and why they should only deal with legal, religious problems detached from everyday reality.⁹⁵⁷ The lack of this

⁹⁵⁰ Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

⁹⁵¹ *Once it is clear that the prayer is obligatory according to Islamic Law, and when five or more gather, they have to perform the prayer and one of them leads it, then you have to apply this obligation. Even if someone contests the theory of general deputyship, saying that he follows tradition, he could still attend the prayer to maintain harmony in society and in the Shi'a community, strengthening religious solidarity. Thus, why do some members of the hawza still refuse to attend Friday prayer, through which you can achieve good results for the present, the future, this world, and the other? Why do you refuse to attend Friday prayer?* al-Sadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, pp. 16, 17.

⁹⁵² *In many books, we find references to the idea that the Friday prayer benefits the community, solves its problems, overcomes its difficulties, and keeps the Ummah from deviation. Thus, be Sayyid Muhammad al-Sadr or someone else leading the prayer, it will still support the truth, repel falsity, and please God and his messenger, and this should be clear in our minds.* Ibid., p. 70.

⁹⁵³ *It [the prayer] is not linked to politics at all. Rather, it is intended only to educate the community, create righteous individuals, increase obedience and good deeds, reduce sins and disobedience, and spread an atmosphere of brotherhood and solidarity among members of society.* Ibid., p. 222.

⁹⁵⁴ al-Simri (2019) *Dawr al-Marja' iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 73.

⁹⁵⁵ *The level of the mujtahid and the marja'ah differs from the level of the common people, and they [common people] have difficulties in understanding them [the marja'ah]. Their level is, in fact, high; from a scholarly point of view, they have difficulties speaking in an everyday language. There is a vast difference between the languages of the newspapers and that of the mujtahid, and it is almost impossible to build a bridge between them. This point marks the distance between the clerics and the people.* al-Sadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, p. 38. Also see Ibid., pp. 69 – 76.

⁹⁵⁶ According to Sadr M. K., Sadr called on his followers to give charity to poor people and accused Hawza of not doing or saying anything to support their community while harming it. He even accused custodians of the sanctuaries of stealing offers to the sanctuaries. Interview with M. K., Najaf (31/05 – 01/06/2024).

⁹⁵⁷ *A number of issues are raised in the streets, in the language of the common people. These issues should be discussed here [in the mosque] and if they are considered a problem by common people, so we [the scholars] should also consider it a problem and find a solution. These are, in fact, the real responsibilities of the hawza; otherwise, what is the point of our existence, just studying and getting tired? People will follow us, so we should be worthy of it. Otherwise, it is unfair that we pretend to be followed.* al-Sadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, pp. 70, 71. See also Ibid., pp. 98- 105.

communication was one of Sadr's main criticisms of other maraja', and the communal prayer was probably an attempt to overcome this problem.⁹⁵⁸ These critiques are part of Sadr's attempt at changing the clerics' image in the minds of lay believers, presenting them with a new kind of clerics, like him, interested in their daily problems.

Sadr described the difference between the two attitudes of the clerics, on the one hand, those who chose silence. On the other, those who want to *enjoy what is right and forbid what is wrong*, as prescribed by the Qur'an (3: 104. 3: 110. 9:71. 9: 112. 31: 71).⁹⁵⁹ Sadr accused other clerics of abusing *taqiyyah* and not taking action while Islam's values and rituals were in danger.⁹⁶⁰ In describing the kind of clerics that he would like to represent, Sadr stressed other characteristics rather than scholarly knowledge, as we have seen. He focused on sincerity, along with the already mentioned will to sacrifice oneself in the fight to preserve and implement Islam, beliefs in Mahdism, and militantism.⁹⁶¹ Other qualities were humility and pauperism, following the example of the Prophet Muhammad.⁹⁶² These characteristics provided the main lines for a model of authority based on the charismatic person of Sadr himself, trying to reform the marja'iyya and transform it from an institution based on scholarly knowledge and the power of old clerical families to one based on militantism and support from the believers' community.⁹⁶³

Iraqi historian al-Ta'i argues that Sadr established communal prayer to hold the Shi'a community together and connected in a period of great difficulties.⁹⁶⁴ It was probably also meant to create a public space to diffuse Sadrist's ideas. Sadr established the Friday prayer

⁹⁵⁸ al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lil-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 448.

⁹⁵⁹ *The maraj'ah has two methods that I already mentioned. One is the method of silence and isolation. The other is the one of activity, enjoying good and forbidding evil. Why did a group of clerics adopt the first method? And why are people following them on this path? They want to save their lives. But only God can decide that. And they save their life but after this world? The fact that the two shaikhs killed [al-Bruḡerdī and al-Ḡarwī] followed this method should be a lesson for all the others. What was the result of remaining silent? Did they save their lives? The Silent ones were killed, and the Speaking ones remained. This should teach us that death is inevitable. As the poet says, whoever does not die from the sword will die from something else. They did not follow their legal duty and got killed, you sinned in front of God, and these sins can not be forgiven.* al-Ṣadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ḡuma'ah*, p. 139

⁹⁶⁰ al-Jibouri (2020). *Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr*, p. 141.

⁹⁶¹ al-Ṣadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ḡuma'ah*, pp. 218 – 224.

⁹⁶² *Is there a person in the hawza who is as honorable as the Prophet Muhammad? Even the Sayyid Muhammad al-Sadr? Is there a person in the hawza who accepts the deeds of the Prophet? Even Muhammad al-Sadr? I come before you as a sinner. Does anybody sit on the ground and eat on the ground? Herds the sheep and welcomes the invitation of a slave to some poor bread? Held yourself accountable before someone else does.* Ibid., p. 242. In our analysis of Sadr's biographies, we have seen that he is often presented as a very humble and pious man, drawing a parallel with the Prophet Muhammad as described here.

⁹⁶³ Sadr openly criticized the power plays behind the choosing of every new march, even though he also played this game. al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lil-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 437.

⁹⁶⁴ al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lil-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 477.

to build direct communication between a marja'ah and the lay believers, pointing at Sadr's conception of the hawza and the marja'iyya.⁹⁶⁵ Al-Simri affirms that Sadr *saw the Friday prayer as a link ("a bridge of communication") between the marja' and the believer that goes beyond the publications of books and fatawa or private meetings with the marja'.*⁹⁶⁶

The Friday prayer gatherings appear to be a central moment of aggregation for this community and a focal point for strengthening this solidarity network, also conveying Sadr's political ideas.

The importance of these moments was also evident to preachers and Sadr himself, and both often stressed how Friday Prayer is a duty for all Muslims, and it had to go on, no matter what.⁹⁶⁷ During the sermons, one of the most chanted slogans, along with "Yes to Islam, yes to the hawza, no to Israel, no to the US, no to falsity," was "Yes to the Friday Prayer," as a symbol of the strong support for the Prayers.⁹⁶⁸

3.1.3 Diffusion of Sadrist Thought in the Years 1997 – 1999.

The spread of Sadr's ideas and network also passed through the diffusion of media containing Sadr's ideas through Sadr's Communication office. One of them was undoubtedly the Sadrist magazine, al-Huda (al-Hudà), edited by Muqtada (Muqtadà).⁹⁶⁹ We could find only one copy of the magazine in the Ba'ath Party Archive. Still, we know it had particular importance and diffusion thanks to two other documents from the Ba'ath Collection. In the first place, the party closely monitored al-Huda distribution. It was worried that it had no permission from the Ministry of Culture or Religious Affairs.⁹⁷⁰ The newspaper was quite diffused among Sadr's followers, as it was used as a reference in Friday Prayers to debates in the Sadrist community and distributed in some mosques.⁹⁷¹ Sadr's followers relate that the magazine was distributed informally through networks of Sadrists or the *wukala'*

⁹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 445, 449. Al-Ta'i states that Friday prayer has a strong mobilization and revolutionary potential and that it establishes direct contact between the marja'ah and the Ummah.

⁹⁶⁶ al-Simrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marja' iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 90. Interview with Sayyid H., Najaf (04/03/2024).

⁹⁶⁷ BRCC 01_2983_0002_0106 (05/12/98). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0776 (27/12/98). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0727, 0728 (25/02/99). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0858 (16/02/99).

⁹⁶⁸ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0776 (27/12/98). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0910 (22/12/98). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0912 (06/01/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0727_0728 (25/02/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0831, 0832 (16/01/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0727, 0728 (25/02/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0635, 0636 (05/02/99).

⁹⁶⁹ Cockburn (2008) *Muqtada al-Sadr and the Fall of Iraq*, p. 93.

⁹⁷⁰ BRCC 01_2983_0002_0109 (30/11/98). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0883 (12/01/99).

⁹⁷¹ BRCC 01_2983_0002_0109 (30/11/98). BRCC 01_2823_0001_0441 (19/09/98). BRCC 01_2983_0002_0106 (05/12/98).

themselves, who came from Najaf, where it was printed. Sayyid A. states that it was published twice a month and printed 25.000 copies, probably exaggerating the number. He also recalls that the Regime would arrest those selling the magazine copies in Kadhimiyeh.⁹⁷²

The issue of the al-Huda journal we find in the Ba'ath Archives is number 4 in the first year of publication. According to its description, al-Huda has a biweekly publication, even though it was probably published much less than twice a month. According to its description, the publication deals with cultural, educational, and science topics. This issue is dated August 23, 1998. On the front page, we find a photo of Muhammad al-Sadr, wearing a white shroud and speaking from the pulpit of the Great Mosque of Kufa.

From the summary we find on the first page of the journal, we understand that it deals with topics very similar to those of the Friday Prayer sermons. The whole pages 3 and 4 are occupied by the transcription of Sadr's sixteenth sermon (July 31, 1998). Another section, on page 4, comprises an invocation to the Prophet Muhammad, explaining how to call on the Prophet in different situations, penned by Sheikh Muhammad al-Nasri (Muḥammad Nāṣrī). On page 4, we find a short essay by Sayyid Mustafa al-Sadr (Muṣṭafā al-Ṣadr), one of Sadr's sons, on properly performing wudu' (wḍū') (the ritual ablution) in different environments. Ali Khalifah Jaber ('Alī Ḥalīfah Ğābir) and Ahmad al-Shamki (Aḥmad al-Ṣamkī) wrote two pieces on the hawza. In the first one, on page two, the author highlighted how the hawza leaders must have a solid heart to bring forth the message of Islam, and the believers need leadership that can inspire them and from which derives nobility and sanctity of the Ahl al-Bayt lineage. In the second, on page 4, Jaber wrote a short piece on the hawza, criticizing and praising it. He refers to the fact that the hawza has at least represented the bastion of Islam for the last 18 years. On page 6, we find a section dedicated to classical Arab literature. This pairs with the page reserved for poetry, on page 14, where Sayyid Naser al-Hussain al-Hali (Naṣir Ḥussaīn al-Ḥalī), Huda (Hudā), and Abu Muhammad (Abū Muḥammad) published their works. A short section on "Pearls of Wisdom" by Sheikh Adnan al-Shahmani ('Adnān al-Ṣahmanī) follows. The other three main sections of the journal are dedicated to science, women's Islamic behavior advice, and applying Islamic jurisprudence to everyday life or, more generally, Islamic juridical problems. In the women's section, we find three articles—the first on the perfect marriage, signed by al-'Alawiyya Y. M.yya (al-

⁹⁷² Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024).

‘Alawiyyah al-Mūsawiyyah). The second article concerns women and the tribal traditions by Huda. Finally, the third is a description of the virtuous Muslim woman. In the science section, astronomy is discussed on pages 8 and 11, while also a section is dedicated to scientific translation. Finally, the last pages are filled with Juridic topics. A short article answers the question, “What is Welayah al-Faqih?”. The answer is that it is the government of the mujtahids (muḡtahid), the government or the power of divine law through the Imam, or, in his absence, through the highest mujtahid, who can wield the Wilayat al-‘Amma. Through this authority, the mujtahid can rule over an Islamic society. Then, we find a short section on prayer and how all Muslims must participate. This prayer established by Sadr is supported by his access to Wilayat al-‘Amma and not a momentary fatwa. So, it appears clear that Sadr has already claimed the title of Wali al-Amr. We find a section on the story of the Mahdi and his four representatives by Sheikh Usamah Bilal al-Najafi (Usāmah Bilāl al-Naḡafi). Later on, on page 14, we find a section called “The Mujtahid and life,” dealing with one of the problems Sadr had highlighted. Mujtahids were not involved with their communities’ everyday lives, thus unable to understand and answer their problems. We then find several shorter sections, called “The Jurist table,” with times to wait before remarrying after the spouse’s death or in case of divorce. Then, “The Juristic Encyclopedia” was filled with suggestions on divorce, family matters, and the like. On page 13, there is a section, “A Reading for the Reader,” on the temporary marriage by Sayyid Abd al-Hussain Sharf al-Din al-Musuy (‘Abd al-Ḥussāin Šarf al-Dīn al-Mūsūy). “The Islamic Library” is authored by Farah al-Ghazii (Faraḥ al-Ġazī), reviewing a religious book. Finally, on page 15, the issue is closed with an article dedicated to Imam Ali and his bravery and courage, titled “Zhu al-Fiqar” (Ḍū al-Fiḡār).⁹⁷³ The article on “What is Welayah al-Faqih?” and the section on “The Mujtahid and Life” are fascinating as they express positions very similar to Sadr’s ideas on authority and the role of clerics. Sadr argued that the Shi’a community needed a more active and politicized leadership, a position that the quietist clerics could not fill, as they were neither involved in politics nor the community’s everyday life and problems.

Besides being spread through the magazine, Sadr’s sermons were recorded in video and audio. Cameras were present at the Friday sermons in the Great Mosque of Kufa ([See pictures 29, 30](#)).⁹⁷⁴ In certain mosques, these recordings were played during Friday

⁹⁷³ BRCC 01_2821_0001_0446 – 0462 (23/08/98).

⁹⁷⁴ Interview with Sayyid M., Najaf (29/05/2024).

prayers.⁹⁷⁵ This indicates a diffusion of these media as well. The video recordings are also still available online.⁹⁷⁶ Audiocassettes of Sadr's sermons have circulated since 1998, both handed out by Sadr's communication commission and sold in markets.⁹⁷⁷ In one of its reports, the Regime also highlights that Sadr's prayer gatherings were recorded and that two cameras were present at the Great Mosque of Kufa. The report also points out how Sadrist should have permission to record these gatherings, and they did not.⁹⁷⁸

Sadrist even organized an art exhibition and a poetry festival, still without any Government's permission.⁹⁷⁹

Sadr's books circulated as well, even if probably some abridged versions. We find traces of diffusion only of the book on the *Jurisprudence of the Tribes* in the documents recorded as "The Legislation of the Tribes" (Sannīnah al-ʿAṣāʾir), as we have seen while analyzing Sadr's relationship with the Iraqi tribes.⁹⁸⁰ This document presents a sort of agreement to be signed by the leaders of the tribe, where they agree to respect religious law, to respect all decisions of the Judge of the Islamic court, to force all members of the tribe to respect Sharia and force those who do not to leave the tribe. Finally, they agreed to consult the faqih to resolve any dispute. This document, even though it shows no direct connection with Sadr or his representatives, shows a similar purpose to that expressed by Sadr in his *The Jurisprudence of the Tribes*.⁹⁸¹ In fact, it is an attempt to bring the tribes under the control of the hawza and to conjugate or impose on them Islamic Law, combining it with the tribal costumes. Such documents also show how Sadr tried to establish contacts and collaborations with the Iraqi tribes, concretizing the theoretical effort of his work on tribal jurisprudence. We find a similar document supporting this theory. The report tells us about an audiotape of Sadr calling the Iraqi Tribes to abandon unIslamic practices.⁹⁸² In this document, though, the writer comments on how this attempt represents a danger for the Regime and how it should be stopped.

⁹⁷⁵ BRCC 01_2983_0002_0106 (05/12/98). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0743 (20/01/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0745 (14/01/99).

⁹⁷⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rtr3xxV1-Dw&list=PLBJFRZ5Dnp9mIQaPociEOg-4kPkGq3Arc>.

⁹⁷⁷ Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyyah (19/06/2024).

⁹⁷⁸ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0886 (29/12/98).

⁹⁷⁹ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0886 (29/12/98).

⁹⁸⁰ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0593, 0600, 0601, 0602, 0603 (11/02/99).

⁹⁸¹ Šeiḥ Ḥakīm Ḥammūz Zāhir distributed it, but we do not know if he was one of Sadr's representatives.

⁹⁸² BRCC 01_2123_0001_0028 (1998).

In another document, we also find a reference to *The Jurisprudence of the Tribes*.⁹⁸³ The preacher of the Hussainiyya of al-Sa'ad/Saddamiyya al-Qurnah (al-Sa'ad/Saḍḍāmiyyah al-Qurnah) (close to Basra) sent the book *The Jurisprudence of the Tribes* but published it with the title *The Jurisprudence of the Tribes in the City* to the Sheikh Sabah Abd al-Mahsin 'Armish al-Maliki (Ṣabah 'Abd al-Mahsīn 'Armīš al-Mālikī), head of the al-Maliki (al-Mālikī) tribe. The Sheikh then brought it to the head of security in Saddamiyya al-Qurnah.

Religious men in the provinces of Basra and Dhi Qar guaranteed to the head of security that it was not political work and only dealt with religious topics and rituals approved by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Closing the document, we find a mention of Muhammad al-Sadr, stressing the fact that he has to comply with what the National Leadership of Iraq has decided, even though there is no direct mention of which decision they refer to.

These documents show us the diffusion of some of Sadr's texts and ideas in different forms, not only through the sermons or the al-Huda journal.

Another means of diffusion of Sadr's ideas and for the creation of public gatherings to spread these ideas was religious celebrations. Najaf's Ba'ath Local Command compiled a study on this phenomenon, focusing on the Friday Prayer and religious ceremonies. In this study, Najaf's command reports that by studying these activities organized by Sadr, they discovered that they are all organized without the permission of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as it is for the publication of al-Huda. Such activities should be notified before the authorities and should receive official approval before they can occur.⁹⁸⁴ Preachers often called on worshipers to participate in other religious gatherings or ceremonies, mainly pilgrimages, for specific circumstances.⁹⁸⁵ For instance, Sheikh Awas Muhammad Muhsin al-Khafajii (Muḥammad Muḥsin al-Ḥafāǧī), on January 8, 1999, called people to perform Laṭam (self-flagellation) as part of the Muharram ceremonies.⁹⁸⁶

Indeed, in Ṣafar 1419 (June 1998), Sadr also called for a pilgrimage to Karbala on foot for the *Arbain* ritual (the commemoration forty days after the death of Imam Hussein). A few days later, he called back the pilgrimage since the government threatened to kill all pilgrims who would try to reach Karbala on foot. The Regime particularly feared these mass pilgrimages on foot as they had given rise to revolts in the past, like in 1977, and Sadrist

⁹⁸³ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0639 (10/02/99).

⁹⁸⁴ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0883, 0885, 0886, 0888 - 0890 (12/01/99).

⁹⁸⁵ BRCC 01_2821_0001_0237 (06/10/98). BRCC 01_2983_0002_0106 (05/12/98). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0779 (07/01/99).

⁹⁸⁶ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0670, 0673, 0674 (21/01/99) (18/02/99).

felt that a call to the pilgrimage was almost like a call to revolt. The head of the Regime's security service in Najaf, Ḥamzah al-Zubaydī (1938 – 2005), met with Sadr and commanded him to call off the pilgrimage on foot. Sadr, fearing for his followers, did so through a *fatwa* ([See document n. 20](#)). A group disobeyed Sadr's orders and went anyway; everybody in the group was arrested. Sadr took the opportunity to reaffirm his authority among his followers, calling them to follow his orders as he wanted their good. Later on, Sadr, nevertheless, called for a pilgrimage to the Imam Ali Sanctuary in Najaf to celebrate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad.⁹⁸⁷

This incident, which might have been minor, would have dire consequences for Sadr and his movement. This was the first time since the beginning of the Friday prayers that Sadr's followers disobeyed their leader's orders and that Sadr publicly gave in to the Regime's pressure. This yielding, coupled with the rumors circulating about Sadr's relationship with the Regime, which, so far, was probably vehemently denied by his supporters, was a significant setback for Sadr's public standing among his followers. Furthermore, as we shall see, this incident was followed by a drop in the number of participants in the prayers, remarked by Sadr himself, showing the actual dimensions of this incident.

⁹⁸⁷ Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

3.2 Second Chapter: Sadrism Confrontation with the Iraqi Regime.

3.2.1 The Regime's surveillance of the Prayers, the Criticism of the Regime, and the confrontation with Sadrism.

Reacting to this explosion of diffusion and participation in the Friday Prayers and the other Sadrist activities that we just outlined, the Ba'athist Regime did not sit idle. As the number of reports on this phenomenon already indicates, the Regime noticed the increasing size of this movement and kept a close eye on it. Apart from reporting on the Friday Prayer, the Ba'ath devised a series of instruments and investigations to follow and curb the rising Sadrist Movement.

At the end of 1998, around a year after the first Friday Prayer gatherings, the Ba'ath Party commissioned a study to its Najaf's section. As we have already seen, the study mentions many of Sadr's activities. Still, it also focuses on how to stop him and his movement or reduce its influence.

They first proposed recruiting experts on religious affairs loyal to the Regime or civilians from Southern Iraq loyal to the government to infiltrate and influence this movement.⁹⁸⁸ They also noticed that Sadr's Movement had rapidly grown and had many followers, especially in the southern provinces and the areas of Diyālā (Diyala) and Baghdad. They attributed this large following to Sadr's "Iranian behavior" in prayer and political attitude.⁹⁸⁹ They also referred to the fact that he has been paid for his actions without clarifying this accusation, maybe referring to the possible Regime's founding in the first years of Sadr's marja'iyya for the office and the schools in Najaf. They state that it was challenging to maintain control of these gatherings as if any error were committed, many people would die. The Regime seemed to appreciate that they had to face many issues at that time in the country, and thus, repressing this rising movement too strongly would probably lead to a revolt that would just add to their existing problems; henceforth, they preferred to

⁹⁸⁸ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0886 (29/12/98). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0899 (07/12/98).

⁹⁸⁹ BRCC 01_2823_0001_0005 (12/12/98). The political nature of Sadr's activities was becoming increasingly evident to the Regime, and again, he was accused of having contacts with foreign agents, such as Americans, Zionists or Iranians.

avoid a direct clash. Possible repression's effects aligned with American, British, and Zionist interests to destabilize and weaken Iraq, according to the report. The strategy of containment before repression was something the Ba'athists had continued to do since the 1970s and the 1980s, as we have seen looking at their strategy to deal with the religious environment in Iraq in that period.

Having analyzed the situation, the Ba'ath officials propose limiting the prayer gatherings. They wanted to do that by forcing the people to attend prayers only in their province, making these gatherings easier to control. Another study by the responsible for the section of Rusafa stated that Prayers should be limited to residential areas and the inner spaces of the Mosques, forbidding the use of the streets near the Mosque to restrict the number of people that could attend the prayer, fragmenting the movement. Preachers should be held responsible for that.⁹⁹⁰ They also wanted to cut roads and block cars with young people between 15 and 25 years old. Again, this report indicates the ages of most of Sadr's supporters. Roads to Kufa should be closed, particularly on Thursdays and Fridays, to stop people from participating in Sadr's Prayer.⁹⁹¹ Another way to limit Sadrist's activities was by forcing Sadr and his representatives to obtain authorization from the Regime for all their activities, imposing the control of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The same went for the cameras, the Prayer gatherings, and the publications. The Ba'ath should try to take back control of the religious schools controlled by Sadr and then hire experts on Religious affairs to infiltrate the movement.

Along with these measures, Ba'ath officials proposed to try and take control of the Friday prayer gatherings by substituting Sadr's representatives in Mosques and Hussainiyyas around Iraq with religious men affiliated with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and paid by it.⁹⁹² Religious men who seemed to spread sectarianism should be suspended from their function. Those with too significant influence in their communities should be moved to other locations to avoid the creation of closed communities that could lead to sectarian divisions.⁹⁹³ Finally, it is requested that Sadr and his representatives mention Saddam's name during their sermons. Also, the report from the section responsible for Rusafa suggested giving guidelines to the preachers. These guidelines should have included references to the relationship between patriotism and religion and the denouncing of enemies of Iraq. As a

⁹⁹⁰ BRCC 01_2328_0001_0131, 0132 (09/08/98).

⁹⁹¹ Interview with Doctor A. F., Najaf (11/06/2024).

⁹⁹² BRCC 01_2823_0001_0005 (12/12/98).

⁹⁹³ BRCC 01_2328_0001_0131, 0132 (09/08/98).

closing request, the Najaf section demanded more vehicles from the central party to facilitate surveillance and control of the Sadrists, highlighting, in some cases, the poor organization and means of the Regime.⁹⁹⁴ Maybe the preachers mentioning Saddam's name in their sermons, which we quoted in the previous section, were complying with these instructions in fear of repression.

This control and surveillance system inserts itself into the already present control system over the hawza. Since the Ba'ath Party came to power, it had been trying to infiltrate the hawza to gain its control or, at least, repress any dissent. In particular, Sadr's activities and Friday prayer gatherings were particularly subject to the infiltration of the Regime's informants, who provided information, as we could see, on all aspects of these gatherings.⁹⁹⁵

Probably as part of this process of infiltration, in the Regime's documents, we find several mentions of H., a member of the Sadr family, passing information to the Ba'ath Party officials. H. declares that Ali al-Shawki ('Alī al-Šawkī), one of Sadr's representatives that we already mentioned, is a follower of Sadr and he had agreed with Muqtada al-Sadr to organize a Friday Prayer in Madina Saddam after the death of Muhammad al-Sadr.⁹⁹⁶ Later on, H. is also mentioned as a member of a delegation to the Vatican, providing information on the visit to the Regime, as he had been part of the delegation to Iran in 1991 along with Muhammad al-Sadr.⁹⁹⁷ He was also known for working for the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Religious Endowments.⁹⁹⁸

The Ba'ath was thus trying to recruit loyal religious men to gather intelligence on the hawza and its members. In the same fashion, they were also trying to choose preachers for different mosques. This process began well before the Friday prayer gatherings called by Sadr, as seen in a document dated January 1995 or from the interviews we quoted.⁹⁹⁹ In this document, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was trying to recruit a preacher loyal to the Regime for the Abu Bakr al-Sadiq Mosque (Abū Bakr al-Šādiq) in the Mahdi al-Uwlaa region (Mahdī al-Ūlā). A partial success might have been represented by Sadr's representatives blessing Saddam Hussein's name during their sermons.

Besides recruiting new and loyal 'ulama, the Regime also tried to coopt the rest of the religious hierarchies. For instance, in 2002, when the perspective of a US-led invasion was

⁹⁹⁴ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0888, 0889, 0890 (1998).

⁹⁹⁵ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0844 (09/01/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0792 (04/02/99).

⁹⁹⁶ BRCC 01_2348_0000_0338 (28/06/99).

⁹⁹⁷ BRCC 01_2348_0000_0384, 0390, 0391 (1999).

⁹⁹⁸ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyyeh (19/06/2024).

⁹⁹⁹ BRCC 01_2129_0003_1006 (05/01/95).

probable, the Regime asked a group of the most important marja's, such as Sistani (Sīstānī), Tabataba'i (Ṭabāṭabā'ī), Hussain al-Najafi (Ḥussāin al-Nağafī) (1932 – 2023), to publish fatwas on the behavior to follow in case of such an invasion. All the maraja' complied with the Regime's tacit request and stated that it would be lawful and a duty for all Muslims to defend Iraq from the infidels' invasion.¹⁰⁰⁰ This example shows how even the most potent maraja' gave in to the Regime's requests, effectively collaborating with it, showing how difficult it was not to give in to the Regime's pressures and putting in context Sadr's careful approach to the Regime.

Sadr criticized the behavior of these maraja' and the hawza, highlighting that many of the maraja' acted only for their interest and that the hawza could not communicate efficiently with the lay believers and not even the death of two maraja', pushed them to speak up. In April 1998, first Sheikh Murtada al-Bruğerdī (1929 – 1998), on the 10th of April (23 Dhi al-Hijja) and then Sheikh Ali al-Ġarwī (1930 – 1998) two months later, in June, were killed by the Regime, framing their deaths like accidents.¹⁰⁰¹ Both were apolitical clerics and not extremely influential; thus, the reasons for these assassinations are unclear. Biographers of Sadr notice how the killing of Burujerdi took place right after Sadr had prayed for the first time in Kufa's great mosque; hence, it might have been a message for Sadr, a threat from the Regime signaling its lack of scruple to kill religious figures. Then, apparently, Burujerdi had also published a fatwa pushing his few followers to join the Friday prayers, maybe presenting another reason for his assassination. Gharawi was not vocal about his political opinions either. Also, this is seen by Sadr's biographer as a message to Sadr himself, as preparing the ground for his assassination. When the news of Gharawi's death reached Sadr, he had to stop in the middle of a sermon because of the pain of hearing about the Sheikh's death, and he closed his office for a few days in mourning, and his followers mourned as well for Gharawi's death.¹⁰⁰²

Sadr nevertheless seized the occasion to remark that people such as these two maraja' who had not criticized the Regime were killed nevertheless. In contrast, those criticizing it, the Outspoken Hawza, were still alive. Thus, if one had to be killed, it is better to be killed speaking up against injustice, Sadr said.¹⁰⁰³ Furthermore, he also highlights the necessity for

¹⁰⁰⁰ BRCC 009-2-5-0001, 0002, 0003 (20/09/03).

¹⁰⁰¹ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024). Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett (2001). *Iraq Since 1958*, p. 301. al-Sīmī (2019) *Dawr al-Marğa'īyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 97

¹⁰⁰² Al-Mayyahi, Abbas al-Zaydi (-). *Al-Safīr al-Hāmis*.

¹⁰⁰³ Hasan p. 373.

Shari'a courts in Iraq to administer Islamic justice. Sadr also mentions the possibility that he will become a martyr, knowing that his critiques of the Regime might have dangerous consequences.¹⁰⁰⁴

The efforts by the Regime, trying to coopt Religious sentiment in Iraq to support the Regime, were generally part of the "Faith Campaign," as we have seen, of which the Regime also saw the Sadrist movement as a possible contribution, at least until Summer 1998. The Ba'ath attempted to implement their idea of a correspondence between the Arab Nation and Islam as its basis. Also, they saw any attempt to depict Islam as a religion exceeding the borders of the Arab Nation as neo-colonialist. In this sense, everybody who would try to use Islamic discourse against the Regime was a danger to the Ba'ath, and the same went for any association between Islam and Iran or other non-Arab nationalities.¹⁰⁰⁵ To implement these ideas, the Regime tried to select loyal religious men to deploy in mosques or other religious institutions. Officials from the Ministry of Religious Affairs compile a list of clerics and their political or religious affiliations: Ba'athists, Sufi, Quietists, Salafists, etc.¹⁰⁰⁶ In these lists, the Ba'athists seemingly make an equivalence between quietists, Sufis, and loyalists, using these terms for the same names in different lists. Ba'athists also compiled lists of political enemies on who to arrest, who to eliminate, and the like.¹⁰⁰⁷

As part of this effort to keep control of the Iraqi population and any social, political, or religious movement, the Regime tried to enlist the Iraqi tribes, trying to meet with their heads and use their forces to guard the Iraqi provinces.¹⁰⁰⁸ The same efforts are reported in other Regime's documents.¹⁰⁰⁹ These efforts testify to the pivotal role of Iraqi tribes in the country's society and, thus, the reasons for both the Regime's and Sadr's efforts to win them to their cause, as we could already observe in the previous chapter.

To these efforts to infiltrate the hawza and control Iraqi society, the Regime added efforts to suppress any threatening religious movement, among which Sadrism started to be, especially after the Summer of 1998.

As a matter of fact, from the fall of 1998 and at the beginning of 1999, the Regime's repression intensified. Sadr's offices were closed, and his representatives were often arrested

¹⁰⁰⁴ al-Sadr (2013). *Huṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, pp. 363 – 372.

¹⁰⁰⁵ BRCC 01_2982_0000_0596 (03/03/96).

¹⁰⁰⁶ BRCC 01_3199_0002_0006 – 0030 (1992). Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyah (19/06/2024).

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁸ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0666, 0673, 0676 (26/12/98).

¹⁰⁰⁹ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0679 (17/12/98).

for short periods and then released.¹⁰¹⁰ Hazem A. also reports that he was arrested almost after every prayer and released one or two days later.¹⁰¹¹ Regime's agents would take plate numbers of all the cars parked outside mosques during the Friday prayers. S. K. was arrested in late 1997.¹⁰¹² Sayyid A. was arrested again after a Friday prayer in December 1998, and Sadr called a demonstration in Kadhimiyeh to demand his liberation ([See document n. 21](#)).¹⁰¹³ Police forces were also heavily mobilized during this period to control and limit the prayers.¹⁰¹⁴ Movement between different provinces was also limited during this period, particularly on Thursdays and Fridays, as people would try to travel from all over Iraq to Kufa to attend Sadr's Friday prayers.¹⁰¹⁵ Sheikh G. reports that security agents tried to block the celebration every time he went to Iskandariyeh to lead the prayer. Even to get to Iskandariyeh, he had to avoid checkpoints by taking country roads. Finally, he was banned from all mosques by the Regime, but he continued to lead the prayer, changing mosques every Friday. The Ba'ath Command of Nahrawan (al-Nahrawān) arrested the local preacher on January 1, 1999.¹⁰¹⁶ The arrest of the Hussainiyyah Imam Ali preacher at Nahrawan pushed the worshipers to gather between 70 and 100 people and go to the Party Command to ask for the liberation of the preacher. Most were very young and marched toward the Ba'ath Command, chanting, "God is great, and Muhammad is his prophet." The preacher had already been moved to another location, and thus, the protest was dispersed by the members of the Party shooting in the air without any further problem. This operation was part of a more extensive campaign between the end of 1998 and the beginning of 1999 to arrest Sadr's representatives. Sadr had already adopted the technique of constantly changing Mosque to his imam Juma' to avoid individuation and arrest by the Regime when possible. The consequences could be heavy if this did not protect the Imam Juma'. Sheikh Kadhem al-Safi was killed in Kut for leading the Friday prayer; the same happened to Sheikh Hussein al-Sweidi in Baghdad.¹⁰¹⁷

The Regime's operation against Sadrist preachers, while having started as low-intensity harassment of preachers as soon as the prayers began, reached a whole new level

¹⁰¹⁰ Interview with Sheikh H. R., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

¹⁰¹¹ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024).

¹⁰¹² Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

¹⁰¹³ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024).

¹⁰¹⁴ Interview with Sayyid B., Najaf (29/05/2024). Interview with Doctor A. F., Najaf (11/06/2024).

¹⁰¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰¹⁶ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0742 (16/01/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0955 (01/01/99).

¹⁰¹⁷ Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

in the aforementioned period at the end of 1998 and the beginning of 1999, with the arrest of preachers and disruption of prayers.

The increase of intensity in the actions against Sadrists came as a response to the increased criticism of the Regime by Sadr, and in turn, his *wukala'*, after October 1998.

This month, precisely on October 16, 1998, Sadr celebrated the anniversary of the establishment of the Friday prayer and listed the many benefits and objectives achieved.¹⁰¹⁸ First, the prayer gave honor and pride to the Shi'a community. It lifted the humiliation that the community was feeling. The number of people attending the Friday prayer all over Iraq grew enormously in one year.¹⁰¹⁹ Also, the awareness of believers of Islam and their knowledge of social and religious issues grew. Among social issues, Sadr asserts that, in particular, consciousness about the material and economic needs of a large part of the Iraqi population and the need for redistribution of goods came to be known by many.

Nevertheless, there were still people in the hawza who were not participating in the prayers. Sadr said, renewing his criticism toward clerics, that they did not realize they could defeat Israel if they joined forces with all other Muslims in Iraq.¹⁰²⁰ However, he also claimed that the hawza had gained courage and that many seminarists participated in the Friday prayer, as also confirmed by Regime's reports.¹⁰²¹ Also, the hawza increased the number of lessons to broaden knowledge about Islam and the number of students, systematizing their knowledge. Sadr called for the creation of new religious schools under his control.¹⁰²²

On this anniversary, Sadr also remarked that there had been a decrease in participation in prayer.¹⁰²³ This drop might coincide with the moment identified by Baram as the moment

¹⁰¹⁸ al-Šadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, pp. 353 – 363.

¹⁰¹⁹ Interview with Doctor A. F., Najaf (11/06/2024).

¹⁰²⁰ *A group in the seminary says that the Friday prayer is not definitive; it is an attempt. Rather, I would say that the prayer is a battle that started, and insisting not to attend it weakens us. If they had attended the prayer, the victory would have been greater; the union between the hawza and the people would have been perfect, and, regardless of the weapons, we could have stood up morally to Israel itself and told it no, and no again, and go back to where you came from.* al-Šadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, p. 360. Al-Simri explains an interesting point regarding the mention of Israel by Sadr: *It is known what al-Sadr meant by Israel, i.e. the Iraqi regime, since the Hawza and the Iraqi people are not in direct conflict with Israel but with Saddam's regime. He almost divulges the name of the regime when he talks about the regime's position on preventing Friday prayers in the streets of Kufa, using the name Israel to talk about the regime, claiming that it killed Hussein, as he says (Why is prayer in the streets in Basra and Amara allowed and in Kufa forbidden? We do not accept that because Hussein has many killers in every generation and generation. In the future, Al-Hussein, "peace be upon him," was killed by Western Christian colonialism as well, and the police forces who were in Israel also killed Al-Hussein "peace be upon him").* al-Simri (2019) *Dawr al-Marġa'iyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 94.

¹⁰²¹ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0904 (25/01/99). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0907 (17/01/99).

¹⁰²² al-Šadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, pp. 497 – 508.

¹⁰²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 363 – 372.

when Sadr's supporters started to diminish, as the rumor about his possible involvement with the Regime became more credible,¹⁰²⁴ probably in connection with Sadr's compliance with the Regime's orders of not carrying out the *Arbain* pilgrimage in June 1998. This situation might have pushed some of the worshipers coming to the prayer to believe the rumors that Sadr was actually a Regime collaborator and, thus, abandoned the prayers.

To contrast this rumor, Sadr stepped up his criticism of the Regime, followed by his agents ([See document n. 22](#)).¹⁰²⁵ At the end of the Summer of 1998, during which worshiper number might have diminished for the aforementioned reason, Sadr could have decided to start criticizing the Regime more forcefully and directly to get worshipers back to his prayers and to fight the rumors of his connection with the Regime. This reading coincides with the fact that the Regime, in turn, stepped up the repression of the movement at the end of 1998 and the beginning of 1999, as confirmed by the Regime's reports, that in this period related repressive action much more than reports from the beginning of the Summer of 1998 or before. It also coincides with the fact that from the Regime's reports, we know that the number of worshipers was very high in January and February 1999 ([See annex n. 4, table n. 3](#)), confirming the success of Sadr's maneuver in attracting his followers back. We have no data on worshipers' numbers from the Regime archive for the Summer of 1998; however, as we said, Sadr himself confirms the drop in worshipers' attendance in his sermon celebrating the one year of the Friday prayer, and the claim is also supported by Baram.

He also highlights the economic siege waged against Iraq by imperialist powers and how performing religious rituals can be a way to push back this siege, which is economical but also cultural and intellectual.¹⁰²⁶ Moreover, he again attacked the Regime that did not support religion, supporting in this way colonialism.¹⁰²⁷

¹⁰²⁴ Baram (2010). *Sadr the Father, Sadr the Son*, p. 144.

¹⁰²⁵ Abbas Kadhim also highlights how, during this period, Sadr stepped up his criticism of the Regime, even though Kadhim supports the idea that Sadr had always been critical of the Regime. Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza under Siege*, p. 48.

¹⁰²⁶ *We now live in the terrible economic conditions imposed by a brutal colonial economic siege. So, we will do whatever we can to oppose it, whatever it is in contrast with colonial politics, starting from religious rituals, such as going to Karbala as a pilgrimage on foot. These rituals will help revolutionaries against colonialism and will help those who are denouncing the siege. Thus, in the end, religion will be a key to lifting the siege, putting popular pressure on colonialism.* al-Sadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, p. 511.

¹⁰²⁷ *Religious rituals are the center of religion, and clearly, from the state's Faith Campaign adopted many years ago, we would have expected support for these rituals, obedience to God's rule, and punishment for everything that was deviating from it. In any case, Karbala's pilgrimage is part of faith. Thus, those who call for a Faith Campaign should support this ritual and even take part in it. Otherwise, it is a contradiction.* Ibid., 513.

Sadr doubled down on this attack against the Regime for not supporting religion by protesting against the Regime's prohibition of going to Karbala on foot for 'Āšūrā' (Ashura).¹⁰²⁸ In this protest, Sadr attacked the enemies of Islam, the colonialist nations of the U.K., the US, and Israel, and explained how they threatened the Islamic rituals and Islam in general.¹⁰²⁹ Moreover, Sadr equates the Iraqi government with an unjust ruler who bases his government on principles other than Islam, comparing thus the Iraqi Regime with colonial powers.¹⁰³⁰ Therefore, his criticism of colonial nations can also be easily understood as criticism of the Iraqi Regime, seeing how the criticism of the Regime became less and less veiled during the fall of 1998. At the same time, he protests again against the Regime's ban on walking to Karbala.¹⁰³¹ The importance of religious rituals lies, according to Sadr, in contrasting colonial cultural influences.¹⁰³² In this sense, traditions such as the Ashura pilgrimage help the Shi'a community face these influences.

Nevertheless, even more powerfully, these rituals and prayers educate the community and create a favorable cultural environment for spreading Islam. Sadr supports the idea that by stopping religious rituals using force, the Regime is actually helping colonial powers, making once again a comparison between the two.¹⁰³³ This strong criticism of the Regime on the ban on pilgrimages might be a reaction to his previous acquiescence to this ban in June 1998, something that had probably led to a decrease in the number of people taking part in the Friday prayers. He also attacked the hawza directly for not doing anything to fight against the ban on pilgrimages.¹⁰³⁴ Sadr also strongly criticized US policy, particularly with the famous slogan "No, no to the US," or "No, no Israel," paralleling the Iranian slogans of

¹⁰²⁸ Ibid., pp. 444 – 456. al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 452. al-Jibouri (2020). *Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr*, p. 142. Ashura is the Shi'a festivity remembering the Martyrdom of Imam Hussain in Karbala.

¹⁰²⁹ al-Ṣadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, pp. 456 – 465.

¹⁰³⁰ al-Ṣadr (1992). *Mūsū'ah al-Imām al-Mahdī*, vol. 2, 347..

¹⁰³¹ al-Ṣadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, pp. 508 – 518.

¹⁰³² Ibid.

¹⁰³³ [...] *The Friday prayer was a thorn in the eyes of the colonialists in general and Israel in particular. It was expected and natural that you [the Regime] would exert the maximum of your force in order to prevent the prayer and prevent its continuation. This effort clearly resulted in reducing religious rites and a certain disregard for society and their attention to faith.* Ibid., p. 517.

¹⁰³⁴ *Have you noticed? We must pay attention to the traditional Hawza's position on Karbala's pilgrimage and its ban. They were passive concerning this question. They did not say a word, nor did they, their agents, or their friends. They talk about anything else but not the pilgrimage, acting like they do not know what happens around them in our society. They do not say anything not in favor of the ban. They leave the question to Sayyid Muhammad al-Sadr and do not take any responsibility. But they do have a responsibility. Their silence is their responsibility. [...] Their lack of cooperation and solidarity has benefited the enemies of God and the colonialists. [...] If you do not know, this is a calamity; if you do know, the catastrophe is greater.* Ibid., p. 511.

“Death to the US, death to Israel.”¹⁰³⁵ Again, he focused on their economic sanctions and military attacks on Iraq and how this is unjust for the Iraqi people.¹⁰³⁶ Many of the attacks on the US were coupled with attacks on the “Shaytan,” saying “No, no to the Shaytan,” which everybody understood as being the Iraqi Regime ([See picture n. 31](#)).¹⁰³⁷ Sadr also declared that it was legitimate to take government property, implicitly denouncing the government as illegitimate.¹⁰³⁸ He repeated the already mentioned accusation to the custodian of the Imam Ali sanctuary of stealing from the donation to the sanctuary and implicitly accusing them of being members of the Ba’ath Regime of being employees of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.¹⁰³⁹ Interestingly, Hasan noticed among the signs of Sadr’s open opposition to the Regime his criticism in a sermon, a hadith transmitted by Aisha bint Abi Bakr, usually viewed negatively by Shi’a but approved by the official Regime’s curricula on Islam.¹⁰⁴⁰

These direct attacks pushed the Regime to try to stop the Friday prayer directly by denouncing the presence of a bomb in the Great Mosque of Kufa and trying to prevent people from entering the mosque.¹⁰⁴¹ Nevertheless, many worshipers overcame the security agents and participated in the prayer.¹⁰⁴² The Regime even tried to make the Prayer stop in Kufa, claiming that the Great Mosque had to be renovated, but Sadr publicly denounced this, and the prayer continued. Another time, there was an attempt to disrupt the prayer by saying that there was a bomb in the Great Mosque of Kufa, but also this time, Sadr understood it was just a way to try and stop the prayer. Both attempts failed.¹⁰⁴³ The Regime also tried to stop the prayer in Kadhimiyya by arguing that the mosque was too small for the worshipers and

¹⁰³⁵ Ibid., pp. 543 – 549. Interview with Sheikh Q., Najaf (13/06/2024).

¹⁰³⁶ *It is clear from our experience that all of America’s [U.S.] wars and conspiracies are economic ones. They create them to drain financial resources from miserable people and destroy their societies only to cover their state’s budget. [...] All the consequences of these wars hit oppressed people in general and poor people in particular. [...] They [U.S.] claimed that the bombing [of Iraq] had achieved its goals, and they lied.* al-Šadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma’ah*, p. 550.

¹⁰³⁷ Interview with M. K., Najaf (31/05 – 01/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024). Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 382.

¹⁰³⁸ Ibid., p. 381. Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024). Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza under Siege*, p. 49.

¹⁰³⁹ Interview with M. K., Najaf (31/05 – 01/06/2024). Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 381.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 381.

¹⁰⁴¹ al-Šadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma’ah*, pp. 634 – 643.

¹⁰⁴² Sadr’s representatives were recruited among young clerics, experts in social sciences and not only religious studies, as this would give them a broader understanding of the Iraqi society they would have to deal with and a different and more easy-going approach compared to the rigid Hawza approach. al-Ṭā’ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Šādiq al-Šadr*, p. 451.

¹⁰⁴³ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0858 (16/02/99). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0854 (05/02/99). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0857 (08/02/99). al-Šadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma’ah*, pp. 634 – 643.

thus could not be used ([See document n. 23](#)). The Regime also retired the privileges that had allowed Sadr before, such as managing visas for international students to the hawza and the possibility of keeping students from their military service.¹⁰⁴⁴

In January 1999, many of al-Sadr's representatives in different towns in Iraq were arrested. Shaikh Awṣ al-Ḥafaḡī in Nāṣṣīriyyah (Nasiriyya);¹⁰⁴⁵ Sayyid 'Aqīl al-Mūsawī, and 'Allāmah Aḥmad Ṣamḡhī were also arrested when there was a demonstration to free the first one, Shaikh Sayyid Ḥasan al-Muḥammadawī and 'Allāmah Shaikh Nadīm al-Sa'idī in 'Amārah. In addition, 'Allāmah Sayyid Kazim al-'Aanī in Kūt and Shaikh Mu'ayyad al-Ḥazraḡī in Baghdad were prohibited from leading the Friday prayers, ignoring the prohibition in most cases.¹⁰⁴⁶ After Sadr's representative's arrest in Nasiriyya, Shaikh al-Zūbaidī was also arrested in front of the Nahrawān Mosque, and Shaikh Taḥsin al-'Abudī was arrested in front of the Abū Ḡraīb Cooperative. These arrests were met with protests by Sadr's followers at different locations. In Nasiriyyah, around 1.000 supporters of Sadr protested the arrest of Awas al-Khafaji.

Sadr and the other preachers called for the liberation of the arrested representatives ([See document n. 24](#)).¹⁰⁴⁷ In particular, Sadr criticized the arrest of his representative in Nasiriyyah, not because this was more important than others, but since Ali Hassan al-Majid, a close collaborator to Saddam Hussein, arrested him. This criticism against al-Majid, and, thus, Saddam, was something the Regime could not tolerate.¹⁰⁴⁸ Sadr declared that arresting one of his representatives was like arresting him, as they were parts of the same body, just like all Muslims were part of the same community, and hitting one of them would have been a blow to the whole group. He asked that such a thing would not happen again in the future.¹⁰⁴⁹

On February 12, 1999, Sadr threatened to organize a revolt by calling on all his representatives to mobilize his followers if the *wukala* were not freed.¹⁰⁵⁰ The Regime sent

¹⁰⁴⁴ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 382.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 382. BRCC 01_3751_0002_0673, 0674 (18/01/99).

¹⁰⁴⁶ al-Jibouri (2020). *Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr*, pp. 143-144. BRCC 01_2974_0001_0858 (16/02/99). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0854 (05/02/99). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0857 (08/02/99). Ibid., pp. 634 – 643

¹⁰⁴⁷ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0858 (16/02/99). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0854 (18/02/99). BRCC 01_2974_0001_0857 (08/02/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0452 (06/03/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0455 (22/02/99). Ibid., pp. 651 – 660. Interview with Sheikh R.i, Baghdad (03/06/2024). al-Simrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marḡa'iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 93.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza under Siege*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁴⁹ BRCC 01_2974_0001_0853 (12/02/99). Interview with Sheikh T., Baghdad (21/02/2024). He was among the representatives arrested in 1999.

¹⁰⁵⁰ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0524 (20/02/99).

an envoy, Muhammad Ḥamzah al-Zūbaidī, to convince Sadr to retire this threat and bless Saddam's name in his sermon. He refused and was thus placed under house arrest and was forbidden to lead the Friday prayer.¹⁰⁵¹ He nevertheless led the prayer on February 19, 1999. In his last sermon, Sadr called for the help of the hawza, trying to distinguish between a fighting hawza and a silent one, affirming that many believers and even Sunnis came to the Friday prayer. All the members of the hawza should also do so.¹⁰⁵² He called again, in front of 10.000 people, for a revolt if the *wukala'* were not freed and did not mention Saddam's name during the prayer.¹⁰⁵³

These threats crossed a red line for the Regime that, once crossed, marked the end of Sadr and his movement as a possible useful tool for the Regime and the end of Sadr.¹⁰⁵⁴

3.2.2 February 1999: The Confrontation with the Regime and Sadr's Assassination.

On Friday, February 19, 1999, Sadr led the prayer in the Great Mosque of Kufa, as he had done for almost the last year. At 7.50 p.m. of the same day, in Hannanah (Ḥannānah) ([See pictures n. 32, 33](#)), his car, coming back from the evening prayer in the Imam Ali Shrine, was stopped by another vehicle, number plate 48491, from Dhi Qar province, from which a volley of bullets was fired in his direction, killing two of Sadr's sons, Mustafa (Muṣṭafā) and Mu'mal (Mu'mal) and mortally wounding Sadr ([See picture n. 34](#)).¹⁰⁵⁵ He died a few hours later at Najaf's hospital.

¹⁰⁵¹ al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 454. al-Sīmrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marḡa'īyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁵² al-Ṣadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, pp. 660 – 669.

¹⁰⁵³ al-Jibouri (2020). *Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr*, p. 141. Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza under Siege*, p. 50. *If their detention continues until the coming Friday, all Friday imams throughout Iraq should work for their release, using wisdom and kind counsel.* We see how, even in these circumstances, the “threat” against the Regime is quite indirect.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (03/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid M., Najaf (29/05/2024).

¹⁰⁵⁵ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0647 (20/02/99). BRCC 01_3455_0003_0652 (21/02/99). Hannaneh was the neighborhood where Sadr lived in Najaf. At the hospital were present two of Sadr's disciples: Shaikh Nadim Al-Sa'adī, the assistant dean for student affairs, and Sheikh Ali Ḥalīfah, a second-stage student. Other students stayed in the hospital with al-Sadr until his death, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Kūfī, Sheikh Jābir al-Ḥafaḡī, and Sheikh As'ad al-Nāṣṣīrī (students of Sadr and leader for the Friday prayer in Nasiriyya and in Madīnah al-Sadr) and helped bring Muqtada to his family house to be close to the rest of the family (al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, pp. 457, 458). Muqtada was subsequently set under house arrest and was closely surveilled by the Regime. Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 337.

Sadr's assassination represents the second turning point for the Sadrist Movement. Its quick growth from 1997 led to an increase in the Regime's preoccupation with it. The growing critical behavior followed by Sadr toward the Ba'ath seems to indicate the responsibilities of his assassination. In the days following the events, the Regime collected rumors about the responsible for Sadr's assassination, relating in a likely accurate way the last hours of Muhammad al-Sadr's life.

In this last sermon, Sadr repeated his request to the Regime to liberate his representatives, but the government had refused.¹⁰⁵⁶ He had even sent a letter to the Comrade responsible for the Dhi Qar province asking to free his representative, Sheikh Awas Muhammad Muhsin al-Khafaji.¹⁰⁵⁷ Ba'ath representatives had then asked Sadr to mention Saddam in his sermons. He did not follow this request and was consequently killed by the Regime's men. Rumors collected by the Regime tell us that Sadr had his shroud with him as a sign of his awareness that he might die and was ready for it.¹⁰⁵⁸

Even though the information we gather from rumors is not to be taken as sure, they might tell a story very close to the truth. Oral sources relate quite similar versions, and other Regime documents seem to point at the Ba'ath as responsible for Sadr's assassination. Indeed, we find proof of the Ba'ath mobilizing additional troops in Najaf on the same Friday as if they were preparing for an upcoming revolt.¹⁰⁵⁹ Trenches were dug outside and inside the city, and communications were cut off between Najaf and other cities by phone or road. In addition, security agents had been deployed in all the towns where uprisings were expected.¹⁰⁶⁰

A Sadrist recounts that he prayed in Kufa with Sadr on February 19, and after the prayer, he immediately returned to Baghdad. On his way out of Kufa, he noticed an unusual deployment of Army forces and Ba'athists.¹⁰⁶¹ Different people in Kufa confirm the presence

¹⁰⁵⁶ BRCC 087-5-3-0510 1(5/03/99). Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024).

¹⁰⁵⁷ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0666 - 0668 (19/02/99). In the second report, we find evidence of another letter handed by Sadr's representative in the province of Dhi Qar, Haydar al-Ghazi, asking for the liberation of Awas Muhammad Muhsin al-Khafaji.

¹⁰⁵⁸ BRCC 087-5-3-0564 (01/03/99). BRCC 087-5-3-0152 (25/02/99). BRCC 087-5-3-0152 (25/02/99). The rumors also tell us, curiously, that the cause of Sadr's death was his fatwa on the permissibility of smoke during Ramadan.

¹⁰⁵⁹ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0765 (22/02/99). BRCC 01_3455_0003_0647 (20/02/99).

¹⁰⁶⁰ al-Jibouri (2020). *Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr*, p. 146. al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lil-Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 453 – 460.

¹⁰⁶¹ Interview with A., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

of a massive Army and Party forces on those days.¹⁰⁶² In this case, it seemed they knew what would happen to Sadr and had taken measures to counter any possible uprising.

Sheikh G. recounts that when Sadr was killed, he was in the school he was managing in Najaf, al-Qawwam School in Najaf, next to the al-Tusi mosque. He realized there was a massive deployment of security forces all over the city. Thus, he went to a friend's house to get news of what was happening. He discovered that Sadr was blessed and in the hospital (*Mustašfā al-Nağaf*). Sheikh Hussein and four other Sadr students immediately went there, where they found a crowd of Sadr's students who were already trying to get information on Sadr's condition. They were not allowed inside the hospital, which was guarded by the Regime's security forces that communicated contradictory news as they wanted to delay the spread of the news of Sadr's death and a possible consequent revolt. Then, for the same reason, security forces arrested all those present at the hospital and buried Sadr secretly during the night.¹⁰⁶³ They were freed the morning after. Sheikh G. and a group of students then discovered the location of Sadr's burial through the drivers that had brought Sadr's coffin to Najaf's cemetery (*wādī al-Salām*). They immediately went there to mourn their leader on his tomb, which quickly became a place of pilgrimage ([See pictures n. 35, 36, 37, 38](#)).¹⁰⁶⁴

Sheikh Q. relates a very similar story; he prayed with Sadr in the evening at the Imam Ali sanctuary, the place Sadr was coming back from when he was mortally wounded. After the prayer, Sheikh Q. returned to his house in Ḥuwayš's neighborhood, Najaf's old city. Going home, he noticed the massive presence of security forces in the old town. He then gathered with some of Sadr's students at the al-Akhound al-Kubra school, and from another house roof, they tried to understand what was going on. Finally, a Sheikh called al-Šemmerī brought the news of the attack against Sadr and that he was in the hospital. They tried to reach the hospital, but Najaf's old city was completely surrounded by security forces that did not let anyone pass. The news of Sadr's death reached them, but they did not know anything else, apart from contradictory reports spread by the Regime to muddy the waters to avoid or weaken a possible revolt.¹⁰⁶⁵

¹⁰⁶² Interview with Sayyid M., Najaf (29/05/2024). Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

¹⁰⁶³ al-Jibouri (2020). *Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr*, p. 144. al-Ṭā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī al-Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Šādiq al-Šadr*, p. 455.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024). Sadr's grave which has turned into a shrine and is visited daily by tens of thousands of Iraqis. al-Simrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marğa'iyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 96.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Interview with K., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

The news of Sadr's death reached the top echelon of the Ba'ath hierarchy very fast. A document to the Presidency of the Republic states that the news of Sadr's death came to the headquarters of the National Security on the night between the 19th and the 20th of February. The document reported the preparation of additional troops in different parts of the country to counter any possible uprising and the alert of Ba'ath commands across Iraq. The director of National Security, 'Adnan Dawud Salman ('Adnān Dawūd Salmān), also met with the head of the Madina Saddam Party Command to consider preventive actions in that area, especially against worshipers from the al-Muhsin Mosque, considered particularly loyal to Sadr. Even before the protests, there were some rumors about a possible revolt in Madina Saddam after the prayer for the death of Sadr on February 20.¹⁰⁶⁶ Indeed, some gatherings of around 150 people near the aforementioned Mosque have been reported. Special forces opened fire on them to disperse the crowd, and anti-regime and anti-Saddam slogans were heard. The crowd chanted their loyalty to Sadr and started setting Party and State cars on fire, to be later dispersed by the Party forces around 12:30 p.m. on February 20.

The death of Sadr produced many rumors about the responsible for his death and the reality of facts, reflecting the lack of clarity and information on these events.

The responsibilities for Sadr's death were attributed to many different actors, and Saddam's Regime also tried to explain how Sadr was an agent of other or foreign parties, trying, in some way, to justify Sadr's assassination.¹⁰⁶⁷ Then, on one side, the assassination was attributed to a broad conspiracy against Iraq led by the US, Great Britain, and Israel aimed to increase sectarian differences and, thus, destabilize Iraq.¹⁰⁶⁸ The conspiracy also aimed at killing religious men in the country to bring disorder and anti-regime riots. The final stage of this conspiracy was to move the hawza from Iraq to Iran so that the latter might control the marja'iyya and all the fatawa being issued. On the other hand, other theories supported the idea that Sadr's death was to blame on the Iranians or the Shi'a for his alleged relationship with the Regime and his threat to the Iranian leadership of the hawza in Najaf.¹⁰⁶⁹ On this line, we find a document about a visit made by a group of women to Sadr's wife. These women accused the al-Hakim family of being involved in Sadr's assassination,

¹⁰⁶⁶ BRCC 087-5-3-0510 (15/03/99). BRCC 087-5-3-0607 (25/02/99). BRCC 087-5-3-0647 (24/02/99).

¹⁰⁶⁷ al-Simrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marḡa'iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 97. Between 1998 and 1999, other than Sadr, two more prominent Shi'a Ayatollahs were killed in what was defined as accidents. These were Ayatollah al-Buḡerdī and al-Ġarwī. Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett (2001). *Iraq Since 1958*, p. 301.

¹⁰⁶⁸ BRCC 087-5-3-0405 (27/02/99). BRCC 087-5-3-0541 (02/03/99).

¹⁰⁶⁹ BRCC 087-5-3-0541 (02/03/99). Interview with S. F., Amman (27/10/2021). Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

as they were not present at the mourning ceremony afterward.¹⁰⁷⁰ Other rumors blame the Wahabis for Sadr's Death.¹⁰⁷¹

Finally, the Regime is thought to be responsible for Sadr's death, as we highlighted.¹⁰⁷² These rumors were rampant in the Shi'a-majority parts of the country. There were rumors about the sum the Regime paid the assassins, awarded with the title of martyrs, and their families, supposedly 6 million Iraqi dinars.¹⁰⁷³

Sadr's wife reportedly died due to the pain of his husband and two sons dying.¹⁰⁷⁴ The same document also reports on Sistani's call to the Friday Prayer, for the first time after many years, probably increasing the number of people going to Mosques and Hussainiyyahs on Friday after Sadr's death.

¹⁰⁷⁰ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0529 (20/03/99).

¹⁰⁷¹ BRCC 087-5-3-0601 (24/02/99). BRCC 087-5-3-0607 (25/02/99).

¹⁰⁷² BRCC 087-5-3-0601 (24/02/99). BRCC 087-5-3-0687 (20/02/99).

¹⁰⁷³ BRCC 133-5-7-0704 (05/07/99).

¹⁰⁷⁴ BRCC 087-5-3-0622 (26/02/99).

3.3 Third Part Conclusions.

This section has pointed out how the Sadrist movement underwent three critical developments from 1997 to 1999. In the first place, the construction of the network of representatives, communication, and redistribution of religious taxes provided a structure solid enough to gather a critical mass of followers and start holding communal prayers every Friday, followed by a religious, social, and political sermon. This first mobilization of Sadrist followers through Friday prayers led by Sadr's *wukala'* was an attempt to pass the boundaries imposed by the Regime on this growing movement, which so far had had some space of maneuver to build its constituency around Iraq with minor or no repression.

The second critical development of the Sadrist movement in those years was the beginning of Friday prayers led by Muhammad al-Sadr himself in the Great Mosque of Kufa. This marked the beginning of communal prayers in Kufa, with thousands of people coming from all over southern and central Iraq every Friday to listen to Sadr's sermons. The sermons dealt with religious, social, and political issues, criticizing the hawza for its immobility, calling for a more Islamic society, and condemning Western powers for their attacks on Iraq and for their cultural influence on the Iraqi people. The correspondence between Sadr's sermons and those of his *wukala'* on the topics and the transmission of directives from Najaf's office and the provinces testifies to a structured and organized movement.

Sadr's compliance with the Regime's orders in June 1998 regarding the pilgrimage on foot to Karbala led to a decrease of worshipers in the Friday prayers in the following months, as he was suspected of complicity with the Regime. To regain popularity, Sadr and his agents increased his criticism of the Regime, starting around the end of Summer and the beginning of Fall of 1998.

This position rapidly brought a direct collision with the Regime, which had been worrying about the movement's growth since the start of the Friday prayers in October 1997. With this new development in the movement rhetoric and the direct attacks against the Regime, the idea of leaving some space for maneuver to Sadr and his followers in the hope of using them to spread religiosity in Iraqi society and, thus, aiding the Regime's "Faith Campaign" vanished. The Regime shifted, after some last efforts to put Sadr back in line, to violent repression, which intensified gradually from the Fall of 1998 to February 1999,

culminating with Sadr's assassination on February 19, 1999, marking the third critical development of the movement.

From this period of the history of the Sadrist movement, it is interesting to notice some developments in Sadrism. On the one hand, with the prayers, especially those led by Sadr, the movement went "public." With its going "public," the relationship with the Regime became even more complex, keeping an indirectly critical position toward the Regime while profiting from the space left open for the movement – as it had interests seemingly in line with the Regime's – became almost impossible in the public space created by the prayers. This situation led to the aforementioned escalation and Sadr's assassination.

Interestingly, the sermons of October 1998 marked the first direct criticism by Sadr and his followers of the Regime, who, until that moment, had avoided political topics directly, focusing on religious and social issues that only indirectly represented critics of the Regime. This remark is especially true in the Iraqi environment of the 1990s, in which the Iraqi Regime supported an Islamization of society, thus allowing discourses dealing with such topics; simultaneously, the Iraqi Regime welcomed criticism of the US and Western powers in general.¹⁰⁷⁵ These two topics represented the main topics of Sadr's teachings before the beginning of the Friday prayers and even after that until the fall of 1998. The only criticism before that moment was played indirectly by calling on historical examples from the Islamic past and the indirect threat of building the Sadrist network between 1992 and 1996.

Thus, it was only after the fall of 1998 that the Sadrist movement started openly opposing the Iraqi Regime, bringing a severe crackdown on it by Ba'ath forces just four months after that.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 381.

4. Fourth Part. Sadrism in Revolt: 1999 – 2003.

In this last chapter, we will explore the development of the Sadrist Movement after Sadr's assassination on February 19, 1999. After this moment, revolts erupted in all of southern and central Iraq. The Sadrist response to Sadr's killing was divided into two main sections: the military uprising and the cultural revolt. The first one was an armed response to the Regime's actions, unfolding in three different moments: a first series of spontaneous revolts, an organized, and failed, insurrection, and a series of attacks against Ba'athist officials. The second section, the cultural revolt, consisted of an attempt to continue Sadr's legacy through the publication of books, lessons, and activities similar to those held before 1999 by the Sadrist movement. Finally, we will look at the continuation of Friday prayers after Sadr's death by his *wukala'* and the beginning of competition among different movement components for Sadr's legacy. Through this exploration, we will also analyze how Sadr was canonized as a Regime's opponent and how the Sadrist network went through the Regime's repression of the revolts.

4.1 First Chapter: The Sadrist Revolts of 1999.

4.1.1 al-Intifāḍah al-‘Askariyyah.

The news of Sadr’s death reached Baghdad on Saturday, February 20, 1999.¹⁰⁷⁶ Some first reports brought the news of Sadr being in the hospital, wounded but not dead. The delay in receiving the news was due to the Ba’ath almost sealing off Najaf as they tried to prevent the news of Sadr’s assassination from spreading too fast and provoking revolts around Iraq. The Regime also tried to muddy the waters by giving confusing and contrasting information regarding Sadr’s death and the possible culprits, as we have seen, with the same goal of preventing or delaying revolts. The Regime also activated its network of co-opted clerics, trying to sow confusion among demonstrators about the real instigator of Sadr’s assassination.¹⁰⁷⁷

Nevertheless, even with all the Regime’s precautions, the news of Sadr’s wounding reached Baghdad and,¹⁰⁷⁸ specifically, Madina Saddam, one of the movement’s largest strongholds, in the late night of the 19th or early morning of the 20th, brought by someone who could escape the roadblocks sealing off Najaf. Sheikh Ali al-Ka’abi, one of the Friday preachers and a vocal supporter of Sadr, called a prayer in al-Muhsin mosque, the principal mosque of the neighborhood, to pray for Sadr’s health.¹⁰⁷⁹ A Sadrist recounts that he met a friend in the Madina’s market who told him about the prayer, so they went together.¹⁰⁸⁰ Upon reaching the mosque, they found a consistent number of worshipers, and they all started praying for Sadr’s health. In the meanwhile, the mosque was slowly encircled by Army forces that were deployed in the Madina early that morning. However, even before that, there was a reinforced presence of Ba’athist security forces in the Madina, showing the readiness of the Regime to repress an expected revolt.¹⁰⁸¹ A witness testifies on seeing a preacher, Sheikh ‘alā’ al-Mas‘ūdī, taking the microphone in the mosque and announcing Sadr’s death.¹⁰⁸² This news started the real revolt. Worshipers, convinced of the Regime’s

¹⁰⁷⁶ Interview with A., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024).

¹⁰⁷⁷ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 336.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024).

¹⁰⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Interview with A., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

¹⁰⁸¹ Interview with Sheikh H. R., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with A., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

¹⁰⁸² Interview with A., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Sheikh H. , Baghdad (19/02/2024).

responsibility for Sadr's murder, began throwing stones and insulting soldiers and Ba'ath Security forces. These answered, opening fire with light and heavy weapons, and the crowd dispersed, with confrontations between Sadrist and the Army and the Regime's security forces spreading all over Madina Saddam.¹⁰⁸³

Sheikh H. S. recounts that he was in school when a certain Sayyid 'Ādil came to the school and informed them of Sadr's death. At this news, the students and teachers left the school and went toward al-Muhsin mosque. They reached Square 55, and from there, they saw Regime forces opening fire on the worshipers. Hence, the group of students started fleeing in different directions and dispersed in secondary streets. Sheikh H. himself was shot in the ankle but could get away.¹⁰⁸⁴ He also reports that the Madina was engulfed in a sad atmosphere that day, and it was raining, a symbolically sad day; the primary market of the Madina, Sūq Mrīdī, was also completely closed down.¹⁰⁸⁵

Another witness, Sheikh R., also tried to reach the al-Muhsin Mosque on February 20, 1999, to join the prayer for Sadr and also a possible revolt of which rumors were spreading; slowly, a large group of people formed, people joined as the crowd went by, moving from *qiṭā'* (section) 16, next to the Sūq al-Ḥayy, toward the al-Muhsin Mosque; They formed a large demonstration, and many people were crying at the news of Sadr's death while marching, according to Sheikh R.; Sheikh E. H. recalls that Sadr's death had caused desperation among people and he reports how they wanted to avenge him even at the price of their lives; when they reached Square 55, next to the al-Muhsin mosque, Regime forces, headed by 'Aīz al-Ra'sah, encircling the mosque, had started firing on those trying to get the mosque and not only on those inside. The demonstration dispersed in secondary streets, and Sheikh Riyadh reached his uncle's house, which was nearby, and hid there.¹⁰⁸⁶

The revolt from the al-Muhsin mosque spread to all the Madina for the whole day and the following days, even if the Regime criminalized the demonstrations.¹⁰⁸⁷ The Ba'ath security services carried out an arrest campaign against all known figures connected to the Sadr movement in the Madina. Homes were searched, looking for Sadr's representatives and

¹⁰⁸³ Interview with A., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). BRCC 087-5-3-0510 (15/03/99). BRCC 087-5-3-0607 (25/02/99). Interview with Hajj Q., Baghdad (24/02/2024).

¹⁰⁸⁴ Interview with Sheikh H., Baghdad (03/12/2023).

¹⁰⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (03/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024). Interview with Qasem Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

¹⁰⁸⁷ al-Jibouri (2020). *Sayyid Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr*, p. 146. Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Taḥaṣṣīṣah (2010). *Muqaddimah lal-Āḍwā' 'alā tawrah al-Ḥusseīn*. Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 335. Interview with Sheikh H. R., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

known affiliates.¹⁰⁸⁸ Subsequently, Regime security forces went to the hospitals in the Madina to arrest or even kill on their hospital beds those who had been admitted on February 20 with bullet wounds.¹⁰⁸⁹ One of the Sadrists interviewed recalls that his brother was killed in this way after the revolts on February 20.¹⁰⁹⁰ Many people also fled the Madina, mainly going to South Iraq to their families' hometowns, fearing the Regime's reprisal for the revolt.¹⁰⁹¹ At the same time, also people affiliated with the Ba'ath living in the Madina left their houses for fear of a Sadrists reprisal against them. For this reason, Sheikh H.'s neighbors, members of the Ba'ath, took refuge in the local party command.¹⁰⁹² On February 20, a Ba'athist named Jamal Jassem Hammoudi (Ġamāl Ġasīm Ḥammūdī) was assaulted in Madina Saddam.¹⁰⁹³

The al-Muhsin mosque, following this confrontation, was closed, and it remained closed until the Regime's fall in 2003.

The Prayer in Madina Saddam was moved to Jama' al-Hikma, where Sadr's office in the area was located. In this mosque, Sheikh Ali Ka'abi, holding one of the sermons for the prayers after Sadr's death, read a revolutionary poem for Sadr authored by the poet Raḥīm al-Mālikī (1962 – 2007), saying, "Oh Al-Sadr, your revenge is a debt on the shoulders of your free men."¹⁰⁹⁴ In the same mosque, Sheikh al-Ka'abi organized a *laṭmiyyah* (chest beating) to commemorate Sadr's martyrdom, creating a simulacrum of Sadr's body and Sadr's coffin.¹⁰⁹⁵ Nevertheless, only small groups of Sadrists could meet in this mosque, as it was kept under strict Regime surveillance, and thus, no other public demonstration could be organized in Madina Saddam.¹⁰⁹⁶

This first significant revolt took place mainly in Madina Saddam. At the same time, in Najaf, the situation remained calm as the Regime's forces besieged the city, with tanks

¹⁰⁸⁸ Interview with A., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

¹⁰⁸⁹ Interview with Sheikh H. , Baghdad (03/12/2023).

¹⁰⁹⁰ Interview with Ali, Baghdad (27/05/2024).

¹⁰⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹² Interview with Sheikh H. , Baghdad (03/12/2023).

¹⁰⁹³ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0641 (21/02/99).

¹⁰⁹⁴ Interview with Sheikh H. R., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Rahim al-Maliki was introduced to Sadr by Sheikh al-Ka'abi in 1997, and from there, he became an ardent Sadrist, reciting poems for the ceremonies of commemoration of Imam Hussain. He composed the poem "Your Revenge, Oh Sadr, Your Revenge" after Sadr's death, and it was chanted during a symbolic funeral organized by Sheikh al-Ka'abi. Many people attended this symbolic funeral, organized in the very first days after Sadr's assassination. This video should be a recording of the ceremony organized by Sheikh al-Ka'abi with the chanting of al-Maliki's poem: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmRGGhU_B3o&ab_channel=%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

surrounding the center; as we have highlighted, these forces were mobilized even before Sadr's assassination.¹⁰⁹⁷

However, Madina Saddam was not the only center of revolt in those days; as the news of Sadr's assassination reached different parts of Iraq, his followers started to take to the streets and protest against the Regime.

For instance, in Šu‘alah in Baghdad, a revolt erupted on February 20.¹⁰⁹⁸ Around 1,000 people gathered at the al-Mahdi Mosque in the neighborhood mentioned above and, at noon, started marching toward the local Ba’ath Command and attacked it. The local Commander responded by opening fire, killing one of the protesters, wounding others, and arresting 64.¹⁰⁹⁹ Right after Sadr's death, also in Kut, there was a revolt led by Sheikh Naser Zamil S. and Kadhem al-Safi.¹¹⁰⁰ On the same day, in the province of Dhi Qar, draft dodgers protested against the Regime for killing Sadr and clashed with Ba’ath supporters.¹¹⁰¹ On February 22, a Regime report tells us that many Sadr's followers converged on Najaf and Karbala from the Dhi Qar province to participate in the following Friday Prayer and transform it into a revolt.¹¹⁰² In the same report, there were worries about agents of Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim (Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ḥakīm), exiled in Iran since 1983 and head of the Badr Brigade, coming from Basra to Najaf to carry out sabotage work. From the Regime's point of view, Iranian aid to the Sadrist revolts was a primary preoccupation. Even though this help never actually materialized, and this remained a central grudge between the Sadrists and the Hakim family even after the fall of Saddam, the Regime's anxiety over this point is evident in its reports.¹¹⁰³ There were also demonstrations outside Iraq, mainly in places where Iraqi immigrants observed the political developments inside Iraq. These were Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Britain, and other countries ([See documents n. 25, 26](#)).¹¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁹⁷ Interview with M. K., Najaf (31/05 – 01/06/2024). Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid M., Najaf (29/05/2024).

¹⁰⁹⁸ BRCC 01_2348_0000_0557, 0559 (20/02/99).

¹⁰⁹⁹ BRCC 01_2348_0000_0557 (22/02/99).

¹¹⁰⁰ Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

¹¹⁰¹ BRCC 087-5-3-0687 (20/02/99).

¹¹⁰² BRCC 01_3455_0003_0641 (22/02/99).

¹¹⁰³ BRCC 01_3235_0001_0337, 0340, 0341, 0344 (1999). Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024).

¹¹⁰⁴ Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Taḥaṣṣīṣah (2010). *Muqaddimah lal-Āḍwā’ ‘alā tawrah al-Ḥusseīn*.

4.1.2 The Intifada of Hour Zero.

The second center of the 1999 Sadr's Intifada was Basra.¹¹⁰⁵ In this city, we have no particular mention of a large protest immediately after Sadr's death. However, it was the center of a later organized Sadrist insurrection known as *Intifāḍah al-Sa'ah al-Ṣifr* (The Revolt of the Hour Zero).¹¹⁰⁶ This insurrection was meant to occur in different places in Iraq, Basra, Madinat Saddam, al-Ammara, Kut, Najaf, and others, at the same set time, the hour zero, on March 17, 1999.

One of the rebellion's leaders in Basra was Sheikh S., Sadr's representative in the city. He had contacted Sheikh Ali al-Ka'abi, leader of the revolts in Madinat Saddam, Hussein al-Maliki, and other Sadr's representatives, who had organized the revolt for March 17, 1999. The rebels should have attacked and taken the televisions, radio, and police stations. Sheikh Silawi had contacted the Badr Brigade in Iran through Abū Ṣarīf al-'Irāqī and Abū Mayṭam al-Ṣādiqī, showing that the Regime's suspicions about Iranian involvement were well-founded. A group from the Badr Brigade should have entered Iraq, crossing the border near Basra, and should have helped the rebels defeat the Regime. Abu Sharif and Abu Maytham had met Sadr a few months before his assassination and had become his followers; Abu Maytham was the head of the al-Rasūl battalion in the Badr Brigade, and a few days before March 17, 1999, had posted his forces next to the Iraqi border, in the Ahwar region. However, Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, the head of SCIRI, did not permit the al-Rasul battalion to enter Iraq. Abu Maytham ignored the order and entered Iraq with a small force of loyal men, forming a force called 'Āmil al-Dāḥil (The Internal Force). He sided with the rebels in Basra but was killed shortly after his entrance into the country along with another Iraqi rebel coming from Iran, Abū Ayyūb al-Baṣrī.¹¹⁰⁷

The revolt was nevertheless stopped almost immediately, as information about it had reached the Security Services, who eliminated some of the organizers.¹¹⁰⁸ The Intifada still took place and was vigorously participated in, especially in Basra, where rebels could almost take control of the city for two days. However, the lack of coordination between the different

¹¹⁰⁵ Interview with M. K., Najaf (31/05 – 01/06/2024).

¹¹⁰⁶ Interview with Sheikh H. R., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

¹¹⁰⁷ Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024). Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

¹¹⁰⁸ Ġābir (2010). *Intifāḍah al-Baṣrah*, pp. 60 – 62.

centers of the revolt, the security service intervention, and the help from Iran that never came, sanctioned the revolt's failure.¹¹⁰⁹

After these two days, the Regime reconquered the city, retaking control of it and repressing all signs of rebellion, killing around 250 people and then burying them in mass graves in the area of Burġisiyyah.¹¹¹⁰ The Regime's reprisal was very violent; Sheikh Silawi's house was razed to the ground, his office as well, and all his family of 42 people was arrested. He fled to Iran and could later secretly return to Iraq. He established contact between Kadhém al-Haeri, the designated successor as a *marja'* to Muhammad al-Sadr, and Sadr's son Muqtada, to whom al-Haeri offered to be his *wakil*, as we shall see. The houses of other 50 Sadrists in Basra were also destroyed.¹¹¹¹

4.1.3 Attacks after the Revolts.

The third phase of the revolts, which overlapped with the two first phases (the spontaneous revolts and the revolt of the Hour Zero), consisted of a series of operations against Ba'athists, trying to assassinate them to exact revenge for Sadr's killing and, ultimately, overthrowing the Regime.¹¹¹² Of course, these operations did not ever come close to the second objective, but they represented a low-intensity urban guerrilla against the Regime until its fall in April 2003. The violence of the Regime's response to the first protests and the perception and the rumors about it stepped up the level of confrontation even from the rebels' side, culminating in this assassination campaign. Rumors circulated that the Ba'ath used missiles to put down manifestations in Madina Saddam, Yarmūk, and other areas.¹¹¹³ This situation brought more clashes and a generalization of violence.¹¹¹⁴ Clashes led to some Ba'athists being wounded and the destruction of State properties. For instance, a Sadrist, Hussain Jar Allah Mahmoud (Ḥussāin Ğar Allah Maḥmūd) from al-'Ubaidi (al-'Ubaydī) and a student at the faculty of Letter of the University of Mustanşiriyya stabbed

¹¹⁰⁹ Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024). Interview with Sheikh H., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

¹¹¹⁰ Interview with Sheikh H. R., Baghdad (19/02/2024). Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024). <https://maps.app.goo.gl/B5Pa1Wc7ZUx9JpUSA>.

¹¹¹¹ Ibid. For a list of the participants in the Intifada killed by the Regime's repression, see: Ğābir (2010). *Intifāḍah al-Baṣrah*, pp. 213 – 282.

¹¹¹² Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, pp. 335 – 337.

¹¹¹³ BRCC 087-5-3-0152 (25/02/99).

¹¹¹⁴ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0766 (1999).

two Ba'athists intending to go to Paradise as a martyr against the Ba'ath to punish them for having killed Sadr.¹¹¹⁵

This behavior was supported by a fatwa by Kadhém al-Haeri, Sadr's successor as a marja', who stated that killing Ba'athists would grant access to heaven. The reports from the party tell us about this fatwa later on, in April 1999, but it might have circulated among Sadr's followers since the last days of February.¹¹¹⁶

By February 25, the revolt had reached all southern regions of Iraq, and, according to the Regime, it was fuelled by the presence of some Badr brigade members from Iran.¹¹¹⁷ The Regime also tried to tie Sadrist revolts with the US and Israel's activities against Iraq, putting them in a sort of alliance with Iran and Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, whose capture was of the utmost priority according to the Regime.¹¹¹⁸

During March, the revolts intensified even more, as we have seen with the Intifada of the Hour Zero, and attacks against the Ba'athists continued. This intensification can be understood from the party's request for a list of Ba'athists killed during these revolts by enemies of the party with ties to Iran.¹¹¹⁹ In Madina Saddam, the al-Rashid (al-Rašīd) section reports that young Shi'as were trained with weapons. These people training the youth also sent weapons to the southern regions of Iraq, trying to set up an armed insurrection against the State for the commemoration of 40 days after the Sadr's death, more or less at the end of March 1999. They warned the central party that the search for cars and people coming from the South was thoroughly done, but it was not the same for cars and people going in the opposite direction.¹¹²⁰

These weapons started to be used, and attacks and threats against Ba'athists were made. On the night of March 19, hand grenades were used against the Party section in Madina Saddam.¹¹²¹ An attack with explosives was also organized against a Party member.¹¹²² Hand grenades were used against the Party Commands in Badr and al-Amin and against the house of a Party member.¹¹²³

¹¹¹⁵ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0730 (25/02/99)

¹¹¹⁶ BRCC 01_2348_0000_0465 (16/04/99). Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024).

¹¹¹⁷ BRCC 087-5-3-0607 (25/02/99).

¹¹¹⁸ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0635 (26/02/99).

¹¹¹⁹ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0644 (23/03/99).

¹¹²⁰ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0302 (17/03/99).

¹¹²¹ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0665 (20/03/99).

¹¹²² BRCC 01_2348_0000_0488 (07/03/99).

¹¹²³ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0230 (01/04/99).

The attack campaign was directed mainly by some of Sadr's representatives, like Sheikh Q.al-Attai, Sheikh Ali al-Kaabi, and Sheikh al-Darraji.¹¹²⁴ However, it was locally directed; there was no central chain of command, as it had been during the prayers or even before. The attacks were quickly organized and executed, with an extraordinarily high risk for those involved, but still managed to hit many Ba'athist commands and many Ba'ath Party members.¹¹²⁵

A group called *Tanzīm al-Šabāb al-Ḥurr* (The Organization of the Free Youth), of which Adel al-Jaza'iri and Muhammad al-Safi were part, organized attacks.¹¹²⁶ Other groups known at the time for their anti-regime attacks were the "Sadr the Second Brigade,"¹¹²⁷ the "Islamic Jihad" group,¹¹²⁸ and the "Shabab al-Thawra al-Islamiyya" (*Šabāb al-Ṭawrah al-Islāmiyyah*) (The Islamic Revolution's Youth).¹¹²⁹

Sheikh Nazar al-Bahadli also organized a group of young people to carry out attacks against the Ba'athists. These operations took place all over Iraq.¹¹³⁰ Sheikh al-Bahadli was still active in 2002, organizing an operation against the Ba'athists in Madina Saddam. In Madina Saddam, also Sheikh Hussein al-Maliki, Sheikh Zuheir al-Abboudi, Sayyid Fuad al-Fartousi, and Ali al-Ba'abi organized operations against the Ba'athists.¹¹³¹ Even before the Intifada of Hour Zero, Sayyid Usama al-Musawi and Sayyid Mu'mad al-Musawi carried out an operation against some Ba'athists in Basra.¹¹³² In Kut, Sheikh Kadehm al-Safi, the Imam Juma' from Kut, created a secret organization to attack and kill Ba'athists. Then, in late 1999, he was arrested and killed by the Regime's security forces.¹¹³³

In April, not precisely forty days after Sadr's death as the rumors had previewed, but around that time, attacks against Ba'ath Commands intensified. In the days between the 14th and Friday, April 16, 1999, large riots broke out in Madina Saddam.¹¹³⁴ Ba'ath Party

¹¹²⁴ Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

¹¹²⁵ Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024).

¹¹²⁶ Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

¹¹²⁷ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0143 (27/07/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0106 – 0108 – 0141- 0143 – 0145 (25/07/99) (01/08/99) (07/99) (07/99) (07/99) (25/07/99).

¹¹²⁸ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0659 (04/05/99). This leaflet was signed by the group "Islamic Jihad" and included threats to Ba'athists. It was found in the al-Mada'in area.

¹¹²⁹ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0505 – 0507 (22/02/99).

¹¹³⁰ Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

¹¹³¹ Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

¹¹³² Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

¹¹³³ Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

¹¹³⁴ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0514 (29/04/99).

members were shot in Madina Saddam on the 15th.¹¹³⁵ On these events, Sadrists were armed with hand grenades, as we have seen, and with Kalashnikov rifles.¹¹³⁶

The Regime responded to these riots. A raid was organized during the night between the 14th and the 15th of April; Sadrists, defined as subversives by the Regime, and draft dodgers, many of whom were hiding in Madina Saddam,¹¹³⁷ were killed, wounded, or arrested.¹¹³⁸ A significant police operation was also organized to limit the Friday Prayers and contain the ceremony in the worshipers' area of residency to break up big and potentially dangerous gatherings.¹¹³⁹

These disorders continued for the whole month of April and beyond that. On April 22, the night before Friday the 23rd, when another Prayer gathering would be held, protests happened near Madina Saddam.¹¹⁴⁰ Arrests of Friday Prayer worshipers were made.¹¹⁴¹ Rioters and worshipers were arrested based on lists produced by the Regime of people who participated in any protest, registering addresses and their activities in the riots.¹¹⁴²

On April 16, a certain Ali Tajil Dulagh ('Alī Taḡīl Ḍulāḡ), who was designated as a "vindicative agitator," was mentioned as a weapon merchant, inciting people, along with some 'ulama, to revolt against the Regime, participate in the Friday Prayers, escape the military draft and help the revolts.¹¹⁴³

Ali al-Ka'abi and his brother, Ahamd al-Ka'abi, also organized a group to carry out operations against the Ba'ath. They gathered weapons and bought two cars for these operations. Ali al-Ka'abi was arrested on his way back from Najaf to Baghdad after organizing a small demonstration on Sadr's grave on April 18, 1999; he was executed shortly after.¹¹⁴⁴ Shortly before this day, Sheikh Q. K. is reported to have said to Ali al-Ka'abi, who was his cousin, "If you do not hide, they [the Ba'athists] are going to kill you," and Sheikh Ali answered, "Sadr faced death, then this will also be my destiny."¹¹⁴⁵ Ali al-Ka'abi would be known from that moment as *Asad al-Madina* (The Lion of Madina Saddam) in reference

¹¹³⁵ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0148 (25/07/99).

¹¹³⁶ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0510 (25/04/99).

¹¹³⁷ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0733 (27/04/99). BRCC 01_2348_0000_0534. We find evidence of a resident of Madinah Saddam, Salimeh Faraj, hiding draft dodgers in her house.

¹¹³⁸ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0160 (16/04/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0555 (18/04/99). BRCC 01_2348_0000_0298 (16/04/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0097, 0099 (05/08/99).

¹¹³⁹ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0281, 0282 (16/04/99).

¹¹⁴⁰ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0312 (22/04/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0514 (29/04/99).

¹¹⁴¹ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0496 (22/04/99).

¹¹⁴² BRCC 01_3759_0002_0504, 0505 (23/04/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0442 (06/05/99).

¹¹⁴³ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0504 (22/04/99).

¹¹⁴⁴ Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

¹¹⁴⁵ Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

to Sadr's nickname "The White Lion" and for his vocal sermons against the Regime after Sadr's death ([See picture n. 39](#)).

In that period, Madina Saddam appeared to be a zone almost out of the Regime's control. In the Ba'ath documents, we find reports of Iranian clerics hiding in the neighborhood, connections with smuggling networks from Iran to the Maysan region, and bringing weapons, people, and other goods in and out of the country.¹¹⁴⁶ Similar dynamics seem to be in place also in the Kadhimiyya neighborhood. Such an Iranian connection worries the Ba'ath about the possibility of Badr Brigade forces coming to help the rebels.¹¹⁴⁷

Iraqi Islamist movements exiled in Iran in that period entered easily into Iraq, from the regions of Maysan and Ahwar specifically, where the border was difficult to control and had been long a place known for smuggling. In particular, it was members of the Badr Brigade that entered Iraq, carrying out operations against the Ba'athists and concretizing Ba'athist fears, but without much cooperation with the Sadrists. Nevertheless, Sheikh R. recalls that some of the aforementioned attacks were carried out by Sadrists but with Iranian support in that period, but they were nonetheless a minority.¹¹⁴⁸ A case of such a network of connections outside Iraq is presented in the person of Ahmad Jazizah (Aḥmad Ġazīzah), a resident of Madina Saddam. He helped people to get out of the country both to Iran and Saudi Arabia, has connections with Security Agents, and, apparently, works with Baqir al-Hakim; he was a muqallid (follower) of Sadr and then of al-Haeri, also concerning his last fatwa pushing to the killing of Ba'athists.¹¹⁴⁹ We find examples of people wanting to exit Iraq. For instance, Faiq al-Musawi, Sadr's representative in the province of al-Ġammās, was preparing to flee the country to an unknown destination.¹¹⁵⁰

At the same time, many of Sadr's followers started to put into practice al-Haeri's call to kill Ba'athists as an act of revenge for Sadr's assassination, as we have already seen. Anwar al-Daini (Anwār al-Dayānī) was arrested in Madina Saddam for killing the Security Service Colonel Hassan Ali Abbas (Ḥassan 'Alī 'Abbas).¹¹⁵¹ Also, there is news of attempts to kill Ba'ath officers in Najaf and other areas.¹¹⁵² To try to stop this phenomenon, the

¹¹⁴⁶ BRCC 01_2348_0000_0277 (28/06/99). BRCC 01_2348_0000_0264 - 0267 (1999).

¹¹⁴⁷ BRCC 01_2348_0000_0271 (05/08/99). BRCC 01_2348_0000_0268 (11/08/99). BRCC 01_2348_0000_0273 (25/7/99). The Regime collects rumors of about 20,000 Badr fighters ready to cross into Iraq on the border with Iran, particularly in the areas of Kalar, Darbandikhan, and al-Ta'mim.

¹¹⁴⁸ Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

¹¹⁴⁹ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0367 (21/05/99).

¹¹⁵⁰ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0240 (04/10/99).

¹¹⁵¹ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0005-0017 (18/05/99).

¹¹⁵² BRCC 01_3455_0003_0347 (16/08/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0367 (31/05/99).

Regime gathers information and arrests followers of Kadhim al-Haeri, attempting to prevent them from carrying out his fatwa.¹¹⁵³ Nevertheless, this is only a part of the activities that were going on in Madina Saddam and, generally, among Sadr's followers. In Madinah Saddam, meetings were held every Tuesday at Jamila Baqir Mahmud's house (Ġamilah Bāqir Maḥmūd), born in 1928, a relative of Baqir al-Sadr and wife of Sayyid Nur Hussain Zalzalāh (Nūr Ḥussaīn Zalzalāh).¹¹⁵⁴ We do not find precise information on what happened in these meetings. Still, they were probably part of a general fervor of anti-regime activities that manifested in the different forms we have listed. Another expression of these anti-regime actions, less direct but probably of no less impact, was the distribution of anti-regime material in various forms. This activity could be seen as disseminating *alternative values* in continuing the construction of a new social movement, as we shall see more in-depth in the next section. In the Madina, being one of the most densely populated areas under Sadrist influence, many attacks against the Ba'athists took place in minor and not organized events. Many Sadr supporters attacked Ba'athists if they found the occasion, with knives or stealing from the Ba'athists themselves the weapons.¹¹⁵⁵

Two Sadrists, Salim al-'Aboudi and Sheikh Nasser S., organized an attack against a Ba'athist official Director of Security (al-Mudīr al-Amin in Madina Saddam), Falāḥ al-Falāḥī, for his role in the killing of Sadr and his role in repressing Sadrist revolts in Madina Saddam. Sheikh Nasser S. came to Baghdad specifically to organize this operation. He and a few other Sadrists organized the operation, planning it in the neighborhood of Saidiya in Baghdad, where al-Falahi lived. With a car borrowed from one of the participants in the plan, they blocked al-Falahi's car at a traffic light and fired on al-Falahi's car, killing him.¹¹⁵⁶

The same group also carried out another operation against the successor of Falah al-Falahi, Asad al-'Ameri, who had previously been the director of Abu Ghraib prison, in the section of political prisoners.¹¹⁵⁷

These operations against Ba'athists pushed 'Uday Hussein to declare that he wanted to make Madina Saddam like the Faw peninsula, bombing every square meter of it. Many houses of Sadrists that participated in actions against the Regime were razed in Madina

¹¹⁵³ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0367, 0368. BRCC 01_3219_0000_0399 (21/05/99).

¹¹⁵⁴ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0093, 0096 (06/03/99) (25/02/99).

¹¹⁵⁵ Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

¹¹⁵⁶ Interview with Sheikh H., Baghdad. There is also a short video about this episode. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oxDyzkIkAk&ab_channel=%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B1.

¹¹⁵⁷ Interview with Sheikh H., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

Saddam, just like had happened in Basra after the Intifada of Hour Zero.¹¹⁵⁸ Also, as a response to these operations, the arrest campaign started on February 20, 1999, and intensified. Many of Sadr's representatives were killed or arrested in 1999.¹¹⁵⁹ This arrest campaign did not hit just representatives but also lay Sadr followers. Many of the Sadrists had to flee, especially after the failed Hour Zero insurrection,¹¹⁶⁰ to Iran, Syria, Jordan, or even Yemen, probably with the help of figures like Ahmad Jazizah, or remain in constant hiding in Iraq, moving from place to place not to be arrested, as Sheikh M. did.¹¹⁶¹ Sheikh K. had to flee to Jordan early in 1999; from there, where he spent two months, he went to Syria, where he remained for two years. There, with other Sadrists who had escaped, they opened a Sadrist office at the Sayyida Zaynab Sanctuary near Damascus one week after Sadr's death. In 2001, he managed to travel to Canada, where he stayed for 7 years before returning to Iraq.¹¹⁶² From this office in Syria, they planned to spread Sadr's ideas outside Iraq and keep the movement alive from outside the country, sending Sadrist publications and letters to Iraq.¹¹⁶³ Sayyid A. also joined this group after spending six months in Iran. From Damascus, he sent letters to Iraq to keep in contact with the movement and keep it alive, continuing to spread Sadr's ideas. Many of those who received letters from Sadrists abroad were arrested, in any case. Many people going back and forth from Syria to Iraq helped them keep in touch with the Sadrists in Iraq and transmit news, information, letters, and newspapers. This contact was possible through the Syrian border but not the Iranian one, as it was much more under surveillance, apart from the southern part where mostly fighters and weapons passed through.¹¹⁶⁴ Sayyid A. then also left for Canada, where he remained for a year and a half, and then he went back to Iraq in 2003.¹¹⁶⁵ D. A., another Sadrist activist in the 1990s, also managed to escape to Jordan after his house was destroyed and his family arrested for their alleged participation in the Intifada of the Hour Zero in Basra.¹¹⁶⁶

Sayyid Y. M., who was in prison since 1996, as we have seen, reports that in those days of 1999, the prison of Abu Ghraib started to fill with Sadrists. He also reports that he

¹¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁵⁹ Interview with Sheikh H. , Baghdad (03/12/2023).

¹¹⁶⁰ Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024). A friend of Sheikh H., Doctor R. S., participated in the Hour Zero insurrection and then had to flee to Syria.

¹¹⁶¹ Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024).

¹¹⁶² Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

¹¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹¹⁶⁴ Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024).

¹¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶⁶ Interview with Doctor D. A. , Basra (05 – 07/03/2024).

managed to keep in contact with Sadrists outside the prison, and he could smuggle inside handwritten copies of Sadr's sermons while Sadr was still alive and preach to prisoners. He could not get Sadr's books inside the prison as guards blocked them. They organize the Friday prayers even inside the prison, but many do not take part for fear of being treated even worse than they were already and being "imprisoned inside the prison."¹¹⁶⁷ Sayyid Y. M. also interestingly reports that some of the prisoners, like Sheikh Muhammad Sadiq, were Sadrists who had tried to escape to Iran and had been captured just past the border by the Iranian military and had been delivered back to Iraqi security forces, ending up in prison. According to him, this was done as Iran did not want to appear as helping Iraqi rebels too much, for fear of reopening the Iraqi front. This course of action might also explain the inaction of the Badr Brigade on March 17, 1999, blocked by the Iranian Regime's caution.¹¹⁶⁸

The repression also hit the inhabitants of Madina Saddam, who were subject to strict surveillance and repression for the following years. A member of a Sadrist family recalls that they could not even hold a ceremony for the funeral of his older brother, killed in the aftermath of the revolts of February 20, 1999.¹¹⁶⁹

This campaign against the Ba'athists continued until 2003, right before the fall of the Regime.¹¹⁷⁰ Apparently, Hassan al-Darraj, one of the members of Ba'ath security forces in Madinat Saddam, was killed by a Sadrist operation two days before the fall of the Regime in 2003.¹¹⁷¹

4.1.4 al-Intifāḍah al-Ṭaqāfiyyah.

The Sadrist Revolts developed on two main sides. On the one hand, armed rebellion, violent clashes, and assassination attacks supported by the marja' chosen by Sadr as the hier for his followers, Kadhém al-Haeri (Kāẓim al-Ḥā'irī) and some of Sadr's *wukala'*, as we have seen. On the other hand, a widespread campaign of anti-regime literature in the form of books, pamphlets, anti-regime flyers, or other tools for spreading their ideas took shape,

¹¹⁶⁷ Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024).

¹¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁶⁹ Interview with A., Baghdad (27/05/2024).

¹¹⁷⁰ Interview with Sheikh H. , Baghdad (03/06/2024).

¹¹⁷¹ Interview with Sheikh H. , Baghdad (03/12/2023).

in which Sadr's son Muqtada had quite a significant role.¹¹⁷² Sheikh R. defines these two branches as *Intifadah al-Askariyye*, performing armed resistance, and *Intifada al-Thaqafiyyeh*, performing cultural resistance.¹¹⁷³ Sheikh E. H. also defines this effort to continue spreading Sadr's works and ideas as part of an *Intifada Thaqafiyyeh*, trying to carry on Sadr's spiritual and cultural legacy. As part of this effort, Sadr's representatives kept performing the Friday prayer even after his assassination, as we shall see later.¹¹⁷⁴

Al-Haeri's *fatwa* supported the Sadrist's armed struggle with the Regime. In contrast, the rumor that Sadr, before dying, had called for restraint in actions against the Regime, fearing the repression his followers would suffer, supported the more quietist approach and focused on continuing Sadr's cultural legacy.¹¹⁷⁵ Here we can see some initial splits within the Sadrist movement, between a more militant trend and a more quietist one; the first supported the revolt, basing its claim on Haeri's inheritance of Sadr's *marja'iyya* and Haeri's *fatwa*; the second side supported a more quietist approach, supported by the aforementioned Sadr's last will. Of course, the division was not clear cut, and many people participated on both sides, but still, from these different references, we see the beginning of some divergences that would grow in the years after Sadr's death and finally lead to a break in the movement after the US-led 2003 invasion of Iraq. Nevertheless, we also must consider that those who remained in Najaf were placed under rigorous Regime surveillance for their closeness to Sadr's sons as a possible focus of a movement resurgence. Thus, they had fewer opportunities for organizing armed resistance.¹¹⁷⁶

Sheikh E. H., Sheikh Abd al-Hadi al-Darrjai, Sheikh Abd al-Amir al-Saedi, Sheikh Hassan al-Haydari, and Sheikh Qasim al-Ta'i all joined the cultural Intifada, publishing Sadr's books and writings after his death,¹¹⁷⁷ and more or less informally led by Sheikh Ya'acubi.¹¹⁷⁸

¹¹⁷² BRCC 01_3219_0000_0385 (06/06/99). In this document, we find information about the network controlled by Kadhém al-Haeri, based in Qom, which has an office in Syria, from which he prints sermons of Imam Ali to distribute them in the Southern Regions of Iraq. Al-Kthriyya distributes one sermon in particular, but it is considered by B. to be probably a fabrication. Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

¹¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹¹⁷⁴ al-Sīmri (2019) *Dawr al-Marḡa'iyyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 86.

¹¹⁷⁵ Interview with Sheikh H., Baghdad (13/06/2024). Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 383. Also mentioned in an interview with Ja'far al-Sadr (Son of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Muhammad al-Sadr's close collaborators) by the aforementioned Hashem al-Shama'. (<https://tinyurl.com/2532cran>).

¹¹⁷⁶ Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024).

¹¹⁷⁷ Interview with Sheikh R., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

¹¹⁷⁸ Interview with Sheikh H., Baghdad (13/06/2024).

During the months of the Sadrist uprising, anti-regime material widely circulated, supporting the effort against the Ba'ath. The Regime's documents contain many traces of these materials. Most of the reports do not tell us about the contents of the pamphlets, the graffiti, or the anti-regime material in general. Nevertheless, from the number of reports on this issue, it is possible to understand the vastness of the phenomenon, its pervasiveness in Iraq, and the difficulties the Regime faced in countering it.

Flyers hostile to the Regime were found around Baghdad, especially in the areas most affected by the riots described in the previous sections: al-Shu'ala (al-Šu'alah), Madina Saddam, Kadhimiyya, al-Rashid, Ġamīla's neighborhood, and Baghdad al-Jadidah (al-Ġadīdah).¹¹⁷⁹ Ba'ath members kept finding these flyers but could not stop their spread or identify precisely who produced them. Some were handwritten, while others are not specified, so we can suppose they were printed.¹¹⁸⁰

Sometimes, the flyers are found in Hussainiyyahs or near mosques.¹¹⁸¹ Leaflets were also found outside Baghdad, such as in Najaf, Qadisiyyah, and the Dhi Qar province.¹¹⁸² They were moved between the different locations by car and, sometimes, even captured by the Regime.¹¹⁸³

In other cases, the flyers were used to deliver threats to Ba'athists at their houses.¹¹⁸⁴ Mostly, these flyers contained death threats with more or less explicit references to Sadr's assassination or the forbidding of Friday Prayer.¹¹⁸⁵ One fascinating case recites, "Your time has come, comrade Mazher (Maḏher)! We will not forget the Sayyid's [Sadr's] blood".¹¹⁸⁶ Other death threats were delivered at the Ba'athist Hussain Aziz Hassan al-Dalimi's house (Ḥussāin 'Azīz Ḥassan al-Dalīmī).¹¹⁸⁷

¹¹⁷⁹ BRCC 01_2348_0000_0544 (25/02/99). BRCC 01_3235_0001_0243 (01/04/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0379 (14/03/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0502 - 0504 (25/02/99). BRCC 01_3219_0000_0671 (04/05/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0445 (05/05/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0195 (16/07/99). BRCC 01_3219_0000_0192 (29/06/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0023, 0025, 0085 (01/08/99). BRCC 01_3219_0000_0598 (10/04/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0413 (22/05/99).

¹¹⁸⁰ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0525, 0529 (23/04/99) (25/04/99).

¹¹⁸¹ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0502, 0504 (25/02/99). BRCC 01_3219_0000_0522 (22/05/99).

¹¹⁸² BRCC 01_3757_0002_0266 (20/02/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0623, 0625 (11/02/99) (06/02/99). BRCC 01_3455_0003_0337 (06/09/99).

¹¹⁸³ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0522 (22/05/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0169, 0171, 0253 (20/06/99) (14/06/99).

¹¹⁸⁴ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0640 (25/03/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0447 (26/04/99).

¹¹⁸⁵ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0509 (22/04/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0435 (12/05/99).

¹¹⁸⁶ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0506 (20/04/99).

¹¹⁸⁷ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0528, 0529 (09/05/99).

Many leaflets also included insults to Saddam or his caricature.¹¹⁸⁸ Others bore the symbols or signatures of the aforementioned anti-regime groups, such as “Islamic Jihad” and “Sadr the Second Brigade.” These groups’ diffusion of leaflets shows an intertwining between the military Intifada and the cultural one. In the reports on these leaflets, the Ba’ath officials state that they will intensify their efforts to find those responsible.

Other support for these messages was also used. Some slogans were found on walls, and others were in the 100 Dinars notes.¹¹⁸⁹ Books were also distributed and exchanged to spread Sadr’s sermons or works of Shi’a jurisprudence.¹¹⁹⁰

Other publications called for the continuation of the obligatory Friday Prayer. Those circulated widely in Madina Saddam and other Baghdad areas.¹¹⁹¹ Flyers, posters, tapes, and photos of Sadr and his supporters were secretly available in different places in Iraq, especially Saddam City and Ġamīla’s neighborhood in Baghdad.¹¹⁹²

The diffusion of these leaflets is a testimony to Sadrist’s activities and vitality in the months after the Sadr’s assassination. They are also proof of the Regime’s difficulties in stopping these revolts, both in their more direct form that we have seen in the previous section and the spread of leaflets and other similar material. All these were probably some factors that managed to keep the Sadrist Movement from collapsing and disgregating. The riots and diffusion of flyers, the formation of groups such as “The Sadr the Second Brigade,” the circulation of books, and such activities were central to maintaining the movement’s identity and network.

Being organized as a pervasive network rather than a party with cells, the Sadrist movement was complicated to crush completely. The movement could not compete militarily with the Regime, and the military efforts were quickly crushed, apart from the sporadic attacks against Ba’athist officials, which did not require military training or organization but were also the result of a general Sadrist fervor diffused in a large section of the Iraqi population. This fervor was the same that fuelled the aforementioned activities and was difficult to quell.¹¹⁹³ This points to a partial success of Sadr’s intents; he had managed

¹¹⁸⁸ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0640 (25/03/99). BRCC 01_3219_0000_0638 (21/03/99). BRCC 01_3219_0000_0620, 0621, 0638 (05/05/99) (21/03/99).

¹¹⁸⁹ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0638 (21/03/99).

¹¹⁹⁰ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0101 (10/07/99).

¹¹⁹¹ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0422 (16/05/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0424 (13/04/99).

¹¹⁹² Blaydes (2018). *State of Repression*, pp. 335 – 337.

¹¹⁹³ Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*.

to win many Iraqis to his cause and convince them of the *alternative values* he proposed, the Islamization of society.

4.2 Second Chapter: Sadrism after Sadr.

4.2.1 The Friday Prayer after Sadr.

The clashes between the Regime and the Sadrists did not end what Sadr probably reputed as one of his greatest successes: the establishment of the Friday Prayer.¹¹⁹⁴ Sadr himself, during his sermons, stressed that the prayers had to be continued even in the event of his death, as his agent continued to do ([See document n. 27](#)).¹¹⁹⁵

The prayer gatherings did not just continue; they were catalyzers and organizing moments for Sadr's supporters to start protests and organize the other forms of dissent we highlighted in the previous sections. It is not a case that the most significant demonstrations happened on Fridays.

Also, Sadr's supporters were convinced that Friday prayers should continue and that it was a religious obligation to continue participating in them.¹¹⁹⁶ According to Ba'ath Party reports, these ideas were prevalent among young and religious people. They believed that this was Sadr's legacy¹¹⁹⁷ and that through this, they could oppose the Regime and revenge Sadr's assassination. The strong calls to continue the Friday prayer were a recurrent theme in almost every sermon after Sadr's assassination, just as it was before. Preachers called on worshipers not to be cowards and back down from the prayers.¹¹⁹⁸ Otherwise, Sadr's martyrdom would be wasted, and his blood shed for nothing.¹¹⁹⁹ Sadr was here connected to a line of martyrs, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr first and then directly to Imam Hussain.¹²⁰⁰ However, his sacrifice would not be useless if his legacy lived through the Friday Prayers and his followers. On another occasion, the preacher Sheikh Abd al-Hamid Zamil Akleh al-Saadi, on February 26, 1999, in the Hussainiyyahh al-Hakim, said during the sermon that

¹¹⁹⁴ For a list of Prayer gatherings in this period, see annex n. 4, [table n. 3](#). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0632 (21/03/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0619 (06/04/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0620 (29/03/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0092 (08/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0602 (08/04/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0559 (15/04/99). BRCC 01_2129_0000_0589 (04/07/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0762 (23/02/99).

¹¹⁹⁵ al-Simrī (2019) *Dawr al-Marḡa'īyah al-Fā'ilah*, p. 46. Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). al-Ṣadr (2013). *Ḥuṭub al-Ġuma'ah*, p. 145. al-Tā'ī (2016). *Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lal-Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr*, p. 449. al-Ṣadr (2013). *Mawā'it wa Liqā'āt Ayah Allah al-'Uẓmā al-Sayyid al-Ṣahīd Muḥammad al-Ṣadr*, pp. 71, 72.

¹¹⁹⁶ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0637 (25/02/99).

¹¹⁹⁷ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0425 (28/06/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0001 (11/04/99).

¹¹⁹⁸ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0374, 0379 (27/07/99).

¹¹⁹⁹ BRCC 01_2348_0000_0482 (05/99).

¹²⁰⁰ BRCC 01_2348_0000_0482 (12/03/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0236 (22/03/99).

the Friday Prayer will undoubtedly continue and that Sadr did not die as he was living in all people continuing his legacy.¹²⁰¹

This emphasis on Sadr's sacrifice and the continuation of his legacy through the Friday Prayers and the actions of his followers accentuate the Millenarian character of the Sadrist Movement. This character was also enhanced by widespread belief, already encountered in the Ba'ath reports about the Sadrist revolts, about the access to heaven granted by the killing of Ba'athists, incited by al-Haeri's *fatwa*.

Furthermore, in these prayers held after Sadr's death, frequent references are made to the near return of the Mahdi and the establishment of his reign.¹²⁰² Adding to this, the Sadrists implemented new religious practices in this period. During the call to prayer, many Mosques inserted the Adhan (Aḍān), a blessing on Sadr's soul, by reading the Surah al-Fatihah (Sūrah al-Fātiḥah) to bless him.¹²⁰³ Also, during the Prayers, the same practice was implemented, and the Surah al-Fatihah was read on Muhammad al-Sadr's soul, while preachers also called worshipers to express their love and pray for Sadr.¹²⁰⁴

These invitations were mixed with calls to remain calm or even respect the Regime's ban on prayers without the Ministry's authorization, probably not to provoke intense and violent repression by the Regime.¹²⁰⁵ Nevertheless, these calls were not always followed or even echoed by all preachers. For instance, Sheikh Ahmad 'Abadi (Aḥmad 'Abādī) led the sermon at the Hussainiyyah al-Zahira (al-Zāhirah) on 02/07/1999 and directly attacked the Ba'ath Party.¹²⁰⁶ Again, the same preacher also calls out Ba'athist hypocrisy for supporting the "Faith Campaign" and, at the same time, repressing the Friday prayers.¹²⁰⁷ Other preachers also attacked the US and Israel, believing that they were really responsible for Sadr's murder, as he was, with his ideas and practice of the "Speaking hawza," a threat to their plans in Iraq. Sheikh S. K., for instance, in his sermon on 12/3/99 at the al-Hakim Mosque, says that the US and Israel had been plotting against Sadr and they still are trying to prevent the Friday prayer from happening as it is a significant threat to them. Thus,

¹²⁰¹ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0385 (01/03/99).

¹²⁰² BRCC 01_3757_0002_0236 (22/03/99).

¹²⁰³ BRCC 01_2348_0000_0450 (08/05/99).

¹²⁰⁴ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0236 (22/03/99). BRCC 01_2348_0000_0547 (02/03/99). Sayyid Bashir Abd al-Razaq al-Musawi, Aal al-Bayt Mosque BRCC 01_2348_0000_0479 (03/99). BRCC 01_2348_0000_045005/99).

¹²⁰⁵ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0236 (22/03/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0723 (28/02/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0385 (01/03/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0001 (11/04/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0723 (28/02/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0522 (29/04/99).

¹²⁰⁶ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0374 (27/07/99).

¹²⁰⁷ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0374 - 0379 (27/07/99).

worshippers have to protect the prayers.¹²⁰⁸ Sheikh S. K. continued to lead the prayer for five Fridays after Sadr's death; then, he was forced to flee to Jordan to avoid arrest and probable execution, as we have seen.¹²⁰⁹ On April 16, 1999, Sheikh Hussain Muhammad Farhan (Ḥussāīn Muḥammad Farḥān), at the al-Alawi Mosque (al-ʿAlawī), spoke about the US and the Zionists trying to eliminate their enemies in Iraq, probably referring to Sadr.¹²¹⁰ In general, preachers mention pretty often in their sermons that somebody, either Israel and the US, or somebody within Iraq, be it the Ba'ath Regime or other 'ulama in the hawza, is trying to stop or damage the ritual of the Friday prayer.¹²¹¹ Sheikh S. K. warned people at the mosque of al-Hakim on 12/3/99 that there are hypocrites among Muslims trying to stop the Friday prayer. Still, he also says that the hawza (the speaking one) will remain strong even after Sadr's death.¹²¹² In the al-Jawadein Mosque (al-Ġawādīn), on 12/3/99, Sayyid Ali Abd al-Hussain al-Mudamghah (ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Ḥussāīn al-Mudāmġah) warned worshippers to stay united against those who want to seed division in Islam. He also read a letter from Bahr al-Ulum (Baḥr al-ʿUlūm) stating that the Friday prayer was now permissible according to the principles of Islamic Law.¹²¹³ Another preacher, Abd al-Hamid Zaamil Akleh, says that the hawza has sent him the message that the prayer will continue no matter what and that it will be a way of taking revenge against Sadr's assassins. At the same time, continuing the prayer will also be a direct threat to Israel.¹²¹⁴ As we can observe, there is a direct line of continuity between the themes of the Friday prayer sermons before and after Sadr's death, highlighting the movement's continuity.

The prayers also continued in Madina Saddam, moving from al-Muhsin mosque, closed after the February 20 revolt, to al-Hikma mosque. Nevertheless, several interviewees confirmed that the prayer in the Madina could continue only for two Fridays after Sadr's death.¹²¹⁵ Hajj Q. attended these two prayers in Madinat Saddam after Sadr's death. A few of Sadr's students, like Sheikh. Ali Al-Ka'abi, Sheikh Abdul-Zahra Al-Suwaidi, and others gathered in the al-Hikma mosque, which was in the middle of the Madina so that it could be a good meeting point for the prayers, and organized again the Friday prayers and sermons in

¹²⁰⁸ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0236 (22/03/99).

¹²⁰⁹ Interview with Sheikh K., Najaf (03/03/2024).

¹²¹⁰ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0522 (29/04/99).

¹²¹¹ BRCC 01_2129_0000_0557 (29/07/99).

¹²¹² BRCC 01_3757_0002_0236 (22/03/99).

¹²¹³ BRCC 01_2348_0000_0482 (12/03/99).

¹²¹⁴ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0385 (01/03/99).

¹²¹⁵ Interview with Sheikh H. , Baghdad (03/06/2024). Interview with A., Baghdad (19/02/2024).

the Madina. The sermons on these occasions were explicitly against the Regime, accused it of Sadr's assassination, and called for revolts to avenge Sadr's death.¹²¹⁶

The prayer also continued in other areas, such as Qadisiyyeh, near Najaf, where Sheikh Naema al-Ebadi became an Imam Juma' in the local mosque after Sadr died and held the prayer for 20 Fridays.¹²¹⁷ Sheikh Hussein al-Shammeri continued the prayer in the al-'Obeidi area, in the al-'Allawi mosque with Sheikh Ala'a al-Mas'oudi, for around three years after Sadr's death, almost to the fall of the Regime.¹²¹⁸ The prayer continued in the areas of al-Sha'ab and the mosque of al-Shurufi.¹²¹⁹

Calls to attack Ba'athists did not remain unheard by Sadrists, who, as we have seen in the previous section, rose in revolt against the Regime and were severely repressed. Most of the organization of these revolts passed and was channeled through the Friday prayer gatherings.

These gatherings, as we could already observe in previous sections, were organized by groups of worshipers, probably more involved with the mosque's activities than others or closer to Sadr and his representatives.¹²²⁰ These groups continued to have a central role in organizing the prayer gatherings.¹²²¹ At the end of February 1999, we got a report saying that groups of young people wearing a badge with the name "Shabab al-Thawra al-Islamiyya" (Šabāb al-Tawrah al-Islāmiyyah) (The Islamic Revolution's Youth) were helping organize the prayers and distributing black tissues to worshipers to wear as a sign of mourning for Sadr's death. The Ba'ath identifies them as "Sadr's supporters". At the same time, Sadr's remaining *wukala'* also had a pivotal role in maintaining contact between the different mosques and Sadr's office in Najaf and what was left of the Sadrist network. Most of them could keep close contact with Sadr's *Barrani* for around a year after Sadr's death, while afterward, they continued activities on their own and on a smaller scale.¹²²²

On the day 22/2/99, for instance, a crowd of people tried to reach Kufa from Madina Saddam to participate in the prayer there.¹²²³ Also, we find evidence of people trying to gain the Great Mosque of Kufa from the city's outskirts on February 27.¹²²⁴ On another occasion,

¹²¹⁶ Interview with Hajj Q., Baghdad (24/02/2024).

¹²¹⁷ Interview with N. E., Kufa. <https://maps.app.goo.gl/qJpSsWj9JBSSEUXC7>.

¹²¹⁸ Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). Interview with Sheikh H., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

¹²¹⁹ Interview with Sheikh H., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

¹²²⁰ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0427 (09/05/99).

¹²²¹ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0505 – 0507 (22/02/99).

¹²²² Interview with Sheikh H., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

¹²²³ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0764 (22/02/99).

¹²²⁴ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0623 (01/03/99).

people converged, mostly university students, at the mosque of Abu Hanifah (Abū Ḥanīfah) in Baghdad to start from there a revolt that would have spread all over Baghdad, according to the Regime's source.¹²²⁵ Sadrists interviewed confirmed these reports, saying that since prayers had been already forbidden in most mosques, they went to pray in Sunni mosques, like Abi al-Nu'mani or Abu Hanifa, since continuing the prayers was an absolute priority for them, as we have highlighted.¹²²⁶

Then, prayer had to be forbidden in these mosques and many other areas of Baghdad to avoid its spread and increase in numbers.

To respond to these activities, the Regime did not just repress actual revolts but tried to control and suppress Friday prayer gatherings using different methods. Preachers were arrested, prayers were forbidden,¹²²⁷ and movements between other neighborhoods and provinces were blocked.¹²²⁸ In Najaf, communal prayer had been prohibited since the end of February.¹²²⁹ The Regime tried to put one of its loyal 'ulama to lead the prayer in the Imam Ali Sanctuary, where Muqtada went to pray, but Sadrists threw him out.¹²³⁰ In other cities and villages, it continued for a while, as we have seen; however, shortly after, it was stopped and prohibited almost everywhere.¹²³¹

On 20/5/99, the preacher Khaled Harifi Hashem 'Akab al-'Akili (Ḥālid Ḥarīfī Hāshim 'Akāb al-'Akīlī) was arrested after leading the prayer at the Hussainiyyah Imam Ali.¹²³² Another arrest happened on 20/4/99 at the Imam Ali Mosque in Nahrawan, where security agents took Sayyid Rahim Jawad (Raḥīm Ğawād) after the prayer.¹²³³ Nevertheless, in this town, the prayer continued until the fall of the Regime.¹²³⁴

The Regime's agents also blocked prayers, forbidding worshipers to pray on the streets next to the mosque but only inside. At the same time, they forbade people to participate in

¹²²⁵ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0420 (12/05/99). BRCC 01_3455_0003_0427 (09/05/99). Also, in this case, people from all over Baghdad were coming together for this prayer. Car brought them from Madinah Saddam, al-Shu'alah, al-Hurriyya, al-Duwaa'li, al-Habibiyye, al-Sha'ab, al-Tawabji, al-Kadhimiyya, and most people were young and university students.

¹²²⁶ Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024).

¹²²⁷ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0427 (09/05/99). At prayer at the Abu Hanifa Mosque on 07/05/99, the Ba'athist agents wanted to implement the prohibition of Prayer, forbidding a group of people from entering the Mosque or getting out of that area to other mosques.

¹²²⁸ BRCC 01_3759_0002_0626 (03/04/99) In this report, the regime agents highlight how the Prayer could only happen within the area of residency of people and within the Mosques and not on the surrounding streets. They also talk about wanting to implement these decisions through Hawza's and Tribal authorities.

¹²²⁹ Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024).

¹²³⁰ Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

¹²³¹ Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024).

¹²³² BRCC 01_3219_0000_0074 (11/07/99).

¹²³³ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0080 (12/05/99).

¹²³⁴ Interview with Sheikh H., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

prayers outside their own residency area, dispersing with violent methods crowds that did not comply, such as shooting in the air or even in the crowd. On June 4, 1999, a group of people walking toward the Hussainiyyah al-Muhsin to perform the Friday prayer was stopped by the Regime's Security Agents, telling them they could not fit in the Hussainiyyah as it was too small and that it was forbidden to pray on the streets. The group started to move toward another Hussainiyyah, but one agent fired in the air and warned them that the prayer could take place only inside the Hussainiyyah, with few people and no trouble. The security agents also warned them that they could not pray outside their area of residency and that the maximum number was 300 people.¹²³⁵ On another occasion, on 30/4/99, at the Mosque of Imam Ali in Diwaniyya (Dīwāniyyah), a crowd was dispersed by security agents as the worshipers appeared to be too aggressive. Security agents fired in the air and then arrested some of the participants outside the mosque. Inside the mosque, the prayer continued.¹²³⁶

The Regime also gathered many rumors about possible revolts and preachers calling for an armed uprising religiously sanctioned against the Regime, referred to as *jihad* in Regime's sources. At the end of February 1999, on 25/2/99, there were rumors that groups of young people and university students in Madina Saddam wanted to use the Friday prayer to start a *jihad* against the Regime.¹²³⁷ Rumors also spread about a possible Iranian intervention in these revolts, with militiamen crossing into Iraq in the Southern provinces of Basra and Dhi Qar. The Regime also collects information on the Badr Brigade, supported by al-Haeri approval, that wants to infiltrate Iraq, particularly Najaf, during the holy month of Muharram.¹²³⁸ In the same report, the arrest of Sayyid Hazem al-Arjii (Ḥāzīm al-‘Arġī) is considered ([See documents n. 28, 29](#)).¹²³⁹

Another rumor reported that many mosques in Baghdad, such as Abu Hanifah or 14th Ramadan, were organizing Friday Prayer, and from there, revolts would start, spreading along those in Madina Saddam.¹²⁴⁰

The different Ba'ath Party Sections' reports show that the number of worshipers remained relatively high even after Sadr's death, notwithstanding the Regime's brutal repression and their ban on Friday prayers.¹²⁴¹ This is strong evidence of the resistance to

¹²³⁵ BRCC 01_3235_0001_0224 (06/06/99).

¹²³⁶ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0468.

¹²³⁷ BRCC 01_3757_0002_0508 (25/02/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0510 (26/02/99).

¹²³⁸ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0494 (19/04/99).

¹²³⁹ BRCC 087-5-3-0607 (02/03/99).

¹²⁴⁰ BRCC 01_3235_0001_0240 (05/99).

¹²⁴¹ BRCC 01_2348_0000_0547 (02/03/99). BRCC 01_3757_0002_0001 (03/04/99). BRCC 01_3455_0003_0468 (30/04/99). BRCC 01_3759_0002_0522 (29/04/99).

Sadrism and its endurance even after the death of its leader and under dire circumstances. The number of worshipers ranged from a maximum of 10,000 people on March 12, 1999, at the prayer in the mosque of al-Hakim in the area of al-Amin, led by Sheikh Salah al-Khazali.¹²⁴² To a minimum of 455 worshipers on April 20, 1999, at the Imam Ali Mosque in Nahrawan, which was a smaller center anyway, led by Sheikh Rahim al-Jawad.¹²⁴³

Many people that before had doubts about Sadr's connection with the Regime after his assassination by the Regime itself and the repression of his followers had their doubts dispelled, and even older generations of Iraqis, when most of Sadr's following had been among the youth, joined the prayers.¹²⁴⁴ This trend might explain, considering also the intense Regime's repression, how the number of prayer attendance remained relatively high.

4.2.2 Sadr's Canonization.

Sadrism after Sadr did not remain confined to Friday Prayers and revolts. It developed a series of peculiar practices, such as the first Surah used as a blessing for Sadr's souls, connected to its intense devotion to its charismatic leader. For instance, pilgrimages to Sadr's tomb became quite common among his followers ([See picture n. 40](#)). The veneration of his figure became evident by the circulation of his pictures, along with those of other important Shi'a religious figures, such as Imam Ali or Imam Hussain ([See picture n. 41](#)). At the same time, *latmiyya* ceremonies were organized to commemorate him, as we have seen. This close association of Sadr with these pivotal figures of Shi'a history was also fuelled by his representatives, who, during his sermons, tried to build a genealogy of martyrdom and wisdom, connecting Sadr with these figures. We have already seen how he was connected to Imam Hussain, sharing his destiny as a martyr for Islam.

In the same way, he was connected to Imam Sadiq (Ṣādiq), the sixth Shi'a Imam, by the preacher Ahmad 'Abadi (Aḥmad 'Abadī) in his sermon on July 2, 1999.¹²⁴⁵ This was to highlight his role as an essential jurist, shaping the practices of Shi'ism itself with his ideas on authority or the Friday Prayer, just like Imam Sadiq had shaped Shi'ism by elaborating his jurisprudential thought.

¹²⁴² BRCC 01_3757_0002_0236 (22/03/99).

¹²⁴³ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0080 (12/05/99).

¹²⁴⁴ Interview with Hajj Q., Baghdad (24/02/2024).

¹²⁴⁵ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0374 - 0379 (27/07/99).

These ideas were also spread with flyers and publications.¹²⁴⁶ There is, for instance, a report of a pamphlet calling for Muslims to visit Sadr's tomb.¹²⁴⁷ Orders by the Regime were also issued to prevent these visits.¹²⁴⁸ This sort of canonization of Sadr after his death brought to the formation and the spread of rumors such as the one who predicted Sadr's return from the dead to announce the imminent start of World War III and the killing of all Ba'ath Party members.¹²⁴⁹ The fact that the Regime assassinated Sadr, according to an overwhelming majority of people, dispelled, among Iraqis, any doubt about Sadr's sincerity in his opposition to the Ba'ath. This situation brought many who before had been doubtful of Sadr's movement to join the prayers, as we have seen, and those who attacked him as a Regime collaborator lost any credibility in their attacks.¹²⁵⁰ Indeed, Sadr's followers never forgot the isolation addressed to Sadr by other members of the hawza and still regard this as one of the grudges between Sadrist and followers of other maraja'.¹²⁵¹ Iraqis living outside Iraq saw Sadr as a collaborator since they could not understand why he had such a space of maneuver; only those who came back to Iraq were convinced of his sincerity, like Abu Maytham al-Sadiqi, who came back to organize the Intifada of the Hour Zero and was later killed by the Regime, as we have previously seen.¹²⁵²

4.2.3 Muqtada's Role and the Fight for Sadr's Legacy.

Sadr's legacy was not picked up only by his representatives but also by his two remaining sons, one in particular. Muqtada al-Sadr, the youngest, started to have a central role in the Sadrist Movement shortly after his father's death, even though he was only 26 in 1999. Mutada was not probably meant to be the heir of the Sadrist network, as he was the youngest son, and the two others, Mustafa and Mu'mal, had much more prominent roles in the movement. Nevertheless, since Sadr was killed with his two older sons, the responsibility

¹²⁴⁶ BRCC 01_2129_0000_0555 (24/07/99). BRCC 01_3751_0002_0514 - 0571 (25/02/99). In this report, we find information on documents being printed by the Sadr office in Najaf and then later distributed in Basra by Abd al-Rahim Abd al-Hassan Sabih in the al-Jumhuriyya Msoque. Unfortunately, we do not have any information on the content of the document, but it is proof of the diffusion of Sadrist material after Sadr's death.

¹²⁴⁷ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0287, 0288 (07/05/99).

¹²⁴⁸ BRCC 01_3751_0002_0353.

¹²⁴⁹ BRCC 133-5-7-0786 (11/07/99).

¹²⁵⁰ Interview with Sheikh R. M., Najaf (12/06/2024).

¹²⁵¹ Interview with Hajj Q., Baghdad (24/02/2024).

¹²⁵² Interview with Sheikh R. M., Najaf (12/06/2024).

of the movement fell on Muqtada, especially as the other remaining son was ill.¹²⁵³ Many of Sadr's followers started looking to Muqtada for guidance after Sadr's death.¹²⁵⁴ Sadrist still went to pay visits to Muqtada in Najaf, even if there were many security forces around.¹²⁵⁵ Also, he was not wholly without experience in the functioning and the activities of the Sadrist network. He had already been running the al-Huda magazine and now tried to rally his father's representatives around him, even though he was under house arrest with his brother, Murtada, and remained in this condition until the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, permitted outside only to pray in the Imam Ali Shrine.¹²⁵⁶ For instance, Muqtada was attempting to set an agreement with Sheikh Ali al-Shawki on organizing the Friday Prayer in the al-Rasul Mosque in Madina Saddam, ignoring the Regime's forbidding it without the Ministry of Religious Affairs authorization. He also taught at the al-Ra'as mosque in Najaf.¹²⁵⁷ Sheikh G. recalls becoming very close to Muqtada in the period after Sadr's death. He and other students in Najaf felt that they had the responsibility to protect Sadr's son. They mostly adhered to the *taqiyya* principle in that period. Sheikh G., Muqtada, and other students gathered in the *Barrani* to study and mourn Sadr's death ([See pictures n. 42, 43, 44](#)).¹²⁵⁸ After two or three months, the *Barrani* was closed down, so they had to move entirely to the Masjid al-Ra'as and the Yazdi school to teach, study, and gather ([See picture n. 45](#)).¹²⁵⁹

In that period, Muqtada wanted to organize a *mağlis al-'azā'* (a mourning gathering) for his father in the al-Tusi mosque. However, government authorities in Najaf did not permit it as the mosque was too central in Najaf, and they feared revolts. Thus, the Regime assigned a mosque outside the city for the ceremony, close to Bahr al-Najaf, the Shrine of Šāfi al-Šafā. The *mağlis* continued for three days, and on the last day, two Regime officials, Qa'id al-Hawardi and Hamza al-Zubaidi, head of the security in Najaf, came to convey condolences from the government and a donation. However, Muqtada refused to meet them and left the *mağlis*, leaving his brother, Murtada, and Sheikh Ya'acubi to receive them.¹²⁶⁰ Muqtada then went to the *Barrani* and kept mourning his father there, but no 'ulama came to convey their condolences, as they were all afraid of the Regime. Najaf was full of police

¹²⁵³ Interview with N. E., Kufa (31/05/2024).

¹²⁵⁴ Interview with T., Baghdad (24/02/2024). Interview with A., Baghdad (27/05/2024). Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024).

¹²⁵⁵ Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

¹²⁵⁶ Blaydes (2018), *State of Repression*, p. 337.

¹²⁵⁷ Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024). Interview with G., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

¹²⁵⁸ Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024).

¹²⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁶⁰ Ibid. Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

and soldiers for a month after Sadr's killing, and the control of the Regime in the town was rigorous.¹²⁶¹

At the same time, Muqtada was also trying to maintain control of the religious schools in Najaf's hawza that his father had taken control of and avoid them falling into the other marja's hands.¹²⁶² In particular, he refused to hand them over to Bahr al-Ulum, one of the most senior marja' alive. He also prevented Bahr al-Ulum from collecting *Zakat* (Zakāah) and *Khums* (Ḥums) from Sadr's followers, managing them himself instead.¹²⁶³ Thus, the school network in Najaf continued under Muqtada's control until 2003, when he left his prerogatives to al-Haeri as he was senior in the clerical hierarchy.¹²⁶⁴ In this period, he continued paying students' salaries through Sheikh Mustafa al-Khafaji and kept the schools in Najaf open with the *Khums* revenues that he kept collecting through the *wukala'* network; he also kept the network in place for what was possible.¹²⁶⁵

Nevertheless, communications between Muqtada and other Sadrists outside of Najaf were complex. Only a few managed to come and go from Najaf to Baghdad or other parts of Iraq, such as Sheikh Q. K., maintaining a line of communication between important Sadrist centers.¹²⁶⁶ As we have seen for the revolts, the organization was primarily local, considering the abovementioned difficulties. For the *wukala'* network, the situation was very similar.¹²⁶⁷ Between 2001 and 2003, communication between Muqtada and his followers became sporadic and weak.¹²⁶⁸

For instance, Muqtada was not directly aware of or directing the attacks against the Ba'athists.¹²⁶⁹ Nevertheless, even if he was not aware of single and specific operations, Muqtada published a *fatwa*, even though he was not technically allowed to as he was not a *mujtahid*, authorizing people to buy weapons and kill Ba'athists, security forces members, and people working with the Regime in general.¹²⁷⁰ Interestingly enough, the *fatwa* was signed "Sadr's Son" (Ibn al-Ṣadr), as he wanted to highlight his connection to Muhammad al-Sadr and derive prestige, charisma, and following from his father.

¹²⁶¹ Ibid.

¹²⁶² BRCC 01_3219_0000_0765 (22/04/99).

¹²⁶³ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0765 (22/04/99). BRCC 01_3219_0000_0768 (18/04/99).

¹²⁶⁴ Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024).

¹²⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶⁶ Interview with Sheikh Q., Baghdad (08/06/2024).

¹²⁶⁷ Interview with T., Baghdad (24/02/2024). Interview with A., Baghdad (27/05/2024).

¹²⁶⁸ Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024). Harling (2007). *The Sadrist Trend*.

¹²⁶⁹ Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024).

¹²⁷⁰ BRCC 01_3455_0003_0532 (17/03/99).

All this information shows us that Muqtada was already an essential figure in the movement right after his father's death or that he was trying to carve out his position as the leader of Sadrism, preparing the ground for the post-2003 events.

Nevertheless, Muqtada was not the only central figure in the Sadrist movement. After Sadr's death, different groups formed to try and claim Sadr's legacy, like Muqtada and the staff of Sadr's office, Ya'cubi and his close collaborators, al-Haeri, and Maḥmūd al-Ḥasanī al-Ṣarḥī (1964 –).¹²⁷¹ These people started to compete about who would pick up Sadr's legacy after Sadr's death.¹²⁷²

4.2.4 Al-Haeri's Claim.

Among these, the one who probably had a more official claim to the leadership after Sadr's death was his designated successor as a *marja'*, the Sayyid Kadhemi al-Haeri.¹²⁷³

We have already seen how he published a *fatwa* allowing and inviting to kill Ba'athists and found a broad audience among Sadrists.

Nevertheless, Sayyid al-Haeri also knew that he could only have partial influence and control over the Sadrist network. He was in Iran and could not return to Iraq as he had fled to Iran in the 1980s, right after Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's death, and was, thus, a fugitive in Iraq. Furthermore, he probably had few or sporadic contacts with Sadr's representatives throughout the 1990s and, thus, did not intimately know the Sadrist network.

Probably for this reason, he permitted Sadr's followers to continue to follow Sadr as a *marja'*, even though he was dead, by following his *Risalat 'Amaliyya*, a text outlining Sadr's principles and judgments regarding Islamic law.¹²⁷⁴

Also, for the same reasons, Haeri sent through Sheikh Walid al-Zamili a *wakala* to Muqtada to be his *wakil* for all of Iraq as an invitation to take control of the Sadrist network in Iraq. This invitation meant both recognizing Muqtada's role and importance but also represented a danger for Muqtada since accepting to be the *wakil* of Haeri, who was a wanted man by the Iraqi security services and whose *wakala'* in Iraq were being arrested,

¹²⁷¹ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, p. 384.

¹²⁷² Interview with Sayyid A., Kadhimiyeh (19/06/2024). Interestingly, after 2003 and the following splits in the movement, all the groups define themselves as Sadrists, al-Ya'cubi and his followers, or al-Khazali and the Asha'ib al-Haqq. Interview with N. E., Kufa (31/05/2024).

¹²⁷³ Interview with Sheikh S., Kufa (01/03/2024). Interview with M., Baghdad (02/06/2024).

¹²⁷⁴ Ibid. Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024).

represented almost signing a death sentence.¹²⁷⁵ For instance, two of al-Haeri representatives were arrested in Iraq.¹²⁷⁶ We do not know if Muqtada accepted the *wakala*. At the same time, al-Haeri, who was based in Iran, invited all Sadr's representatives to Damascus, to the new Sadrist office opened in Sayyida Zaynab sanctuary, to officially receive his new mandate to be his representatives ([See documents n. 30, 31](#)). In such a way, he would be formalizing his succession to Sadr.¹²⁷⁷

4.2.5 Ya'cubi's Claim.

The other contender for Sadr's legacy was one of his most trusted students and collaborators, Sheikh Muhammad Ya'cubi.

After Sadr's death, many of the *wakala* remained in contact with Sheikh Ya'acubi as one of the most critical figures in Sadr's office, and thus, he started trying to build his claim as Sadr's successor.¹²⁷⁸ According to Sheikh R. M., who then became a student of Ya'cubi, Sadr himself designated Sheikh al-Ya'cubi as his successor during a sermon and in a lesson, as he knew the Regime might kill him. Sadr did not directly name al-Ya'cubi but clearly said that his successor should be one of his students, the best of his students, who had a good heart, focused on social justice, and belonged to the outspoken hawza.¹²⁷⁹ Also, according to Sheikh E. H., another of Ya'cubi's students, Ya'cubi was chosen as Sadr's successor as he was the most knowledgeable of Sadr's students and was not an extremist but belonged more to those who supported a cultural intifada after Sadr's death in order to protect Sadr's followers from Regime's reprisal.¹²⁸⁰ Sheikh R. M. recounts that Ya'cubi, during the 1980s, was in Baghdad, and his father, Sheikh Musa al-Ya'cubi, was one of Muhsin al-Hakim's representatives, testifying to the long religious tradition of his family.¹²⁸¹ In the same period, Sadr was under house arrest in Najaf after Baqir al-Sadr's assassination. Al-Ya'cubi's uncle, Sheikh Sadiq al-Ya'cubi, lived next to Sadr's house. Al-Ya'cubi was also placed under

¹²⁷⁵ Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024). Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024). Some interviewees speculate that this move from Haeri was meant to take out Muqtada by having the Regime arrest him for being a representative of Haeri and then take control of the Sadrist network, his large number of followers, and revenues in religious taxes.

¹²⁷⁶ Interview with Sheikh H., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

¹²⁷⁷ BRCC 01_3219_0000_0651 (08/05/99).

¹²⁷⁸ Interview with Sheikh H., Baghdad (03/06/2024).

¹²⁷⁹ Interview with Sheikh R. M., Najaf (12/06/2024). We could not find the reference in Sadr's sermons or lessons.

¹²⁸⁰ Interview with Sheikh H., Najaf (13/06/2024).

¹²⁸¹ Interview with Sheikh R. M., Najaf (12/06/2024).

house arrest in 1984 in his uncle's house, for refusing to participate in military service. Thus, he lived there studying Islamic sciences. The uncle started looking for a teacher to guide his nephew in his studies and asked Sadr. Sadr read al-Ya'cubi's writings on Islamic sciences and accepted to be his teacher. Al-Ya'cubi was only 24 and was studying engineering, but he was more interested in Islamic studies and religion, also thanks to his family background. Sadr, who was also writing in his imprisonment many of his works like "*Ma wara al-Fiqh*," saw in al-Ya'cubi a young, promising scholar, interested both in Islamic studies and also in hard sciences.¹²⁸² This story of Ya'cubi and Sadr's acquaintance is meant to convey the idea that Ya'cubi was among the oldest and most trusted of Sadr's students, and he was formed by Sadr himself to become his successor in the movement, thus supporting and justifying his claim even in front of the one of the son.

However, not all the Sadristes agreed with this view, and many thought Ya'cubi's claim was not solid or justified. According to Sayyid Y. M., Sheikh Ya'cubi offered very different interpretations of Islam and Sharia from what Sadr had done, but he still claimed to be his heir. He started to sit in Sadr's place in the Barrani and pray in his place in the Imam Ali Shrine as if he wanted to take his place altogether, so people started to distance themselves from him. Only after 2003 could he gather a new following by forming the *Hizb al-Fadila* (The Party of the Virtue), with other Sadr students loyal to him.¹²⁸³ Sheikh G. stated that Sadr's followers and representatives were close to Sadr in two ways: physical and spiritual. Only those who had the second really remained loyal to Sadr's ideas and legacy. Al-Ya'cubi wanted to become a marja', gathering Sadr's followers as his own, but was close to Sadr only physically but not spiritually, implying that Muqtada was the true spiritual heir of the father, in Sheikh G.'s opinion.¹²⁸⁴

4.3 Fourth Part Conclusions.

In this section, we have explored what happened to the Sadrist movement after Sadr's death. We saw how the rebellion started by Sadr calling on the liberation of his representatives in January and February 1999, and then took a new dimension with Sadr's death. This period after Sadr's death continued the movement's open rebellion, thus marking

¹²⁸² Ibid.

¹²⁸³ Interview with Sayyid Y., Baghdad (10/06/2024). Interview with G., Baghdad (04/06/2024).

¹²⁸⁴ Ibid.

the shift from the veiled and indirect opposition that the movement had carried on for most of the 1990s to an open rebellion.

On the one hand, it took a military dimension. We have divided this phase into three main steps: the first spontaneous revolts immediately after Sadr's death, mainly in Madina Saddam and other cities in central and southern Iraq; then, we have explored the organization, the unfolding and the failure of a coordinated revolt that should have taken place in Madina Saddam, Basra and other centers in Iraq. Finally, we have looked at the long and uncoordinated series of attacks and assassination operations that Sadrists organized against Ba'athist officials. In all this, we could also observe Iran's and Iraqi groups in Iran's role in these revolts and attacks and their relationship with the Sadrist movement.

On the other hand, the Sadrist revolt took a cultural dimension, trying to perpetuate Sadr's legacy by continuing the Friday prayers and challenging the Regime's bans. Sadr's *wukala'* and followers organized ceremonies and distributed flyers, books, and publications to keep the Sadrist network alive. At the same time, a veneration for Sadr's figure started to emerge; he was canonized as a rebel and revolutionary by his assassination from the Regime, which dispelled any doubts about the sincerity of his opposition to Saddam. In this way, the Sadrists could also claim to be the only actual Iraqi opposition that had suffered under Saddam by remaining in Iraq and fighting in whatever way they could. At the same time, other groups in exile since the 1980s lost touch with Iraqi reality and thus were not able to understand how the Iraqi Regime had to be fought inside Iraq. This discourse would be a potent claim after 2003 when many of the Iranian or Western-based opposition groups returned to Iraq and claimed their share in the new government.

Finally, this period and all these activities saw a general fragmentation of the Sadrist network, which had to go underground to survive, partially managing to, especially after 1999. At the same time, different figures tried to keep the movement together and take control of it. Locally, the *wukala'* took the initiative, calling Friday prayers and organizing armed operations, with limited contact with Najaf's office. Generally, Muqtada emerged as a contender for his father's legacy. He took the initiative by organizing prayers, keeping together the movement's network of schools and students, especially in Najaf, and continuing to collect what he could regarding religious taxes as the only revenue for the movement. Two other figures claimed Sadr's legacy: Sayyid Kadhém al-Haeri, Sadr's declared heir as a *marja'*, and Sheikh Muhammad Ya'cubi, one of the most trusted Sadr's collaborators.

Sayyid al-Haeri had been in Iran since 1980 and, thus, had little influence over the network in Iraq. He tried to gain some by naming Muqtada his *wakil* for Iraq, but with little results.

Muhammad Ya'cubi had a better position in Iraq and some following among the Sadrists. However, his claim also did not find such significant support, overpowered by Muqtada's direct connection with Sadr and followers' loyalty to the Sadr family as the movement's leaders.

These clashes in this 1999 – 2003 phase will also have repercussions on the movement's post-2003 development, leading to splits among the Sadrists.

Nevertheless, we have seen how some of the structures built during the 1990s survived the Regime's repression, going underground and reducing its activities. This structure, also relying heavily on personal and informal connections, will provide the basis for the movement's post-2003 development and its quick redeployment after the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Conclusions.

In this work, we could retrace with precision the birth and development of the Sadrist movement in the 1990s, pointing to the different turning points of this history in the decade. As we already highlighted, giving precise dates, especially for the period from 1992 – 1997, is particularly challenging, as we have few written sources that can date with precision events. Furthermore, most of the processes described in the second chapter, such as the diffusion of Sadr's *marja'iyya*, the recruiting of new students in the *hawza*, and the construction and politicization of the *wukala'* network, are developments that span over a period of time and did not take place at once. Nevertheless, defying a periodization of the movement's history is essential in understanding the shifts in the relationship between the movement and the Regime and observing the changing strategy of Sadrists. The only author who has tried to propose a periodization is Hasan. In his article on Sadrism in the 1990s, he divides the movement's development into two phases: one of alignment of interests with the Regime from 1994 to 1997, the beginning of the prayers led by Sadr's agents, and then a period of clash with the Ba'ath from 1997 to 1999, the assassination of Sadr.¹²⁸⁵

This work's periodization differs in several points; first, we date to the period 1992 – 1993 – right after al-Khu'i's death – the beginning of the first phase of Sadrism. Many interviews point to the fact that Sadr started gathering students in 1992, as some of his most loyal agents and collaborators point to that year as the beginning of their studies in the *hawza* with Sadr. Secondly, we extend the period of alignment of interests with the Regime to mid-summer 1998, finding in the period Fall 1997 – Summer 1998 a period of transition in which Sadrists started to test the boundaries set by the Ba'ath but did not yet openly oppose it. Finally, the open clash with the Regime is set between Fall 1998 and February 1999, with Sadr at the helm of the movement, but continues until 2003 without him.

This periodization derives from the detailed reconstruction of the movement's history and the examination — which could still be improved — of its internal dynamics.

The close examination started with a broader exploration of the regional context and the longer historical frame in which the movement originated.

In this sense, we looked at the rise of Islamism in the whole Arab region in the second half of the 20th century. Specifically, we looked at the Shi'a Islamist movement in Iraq and

¹²⁸⁵ Hasan (2021). *The Roots of the Sadrist Movement*, pp. 378, 379.

its almost total demise around 1980, the attempts by the Ba'ath Iraqi Regime to control the religious environment in the country, and how these attempts evolved following the regional and international context into the 1993 "Faith Campaign" and the efforts to put at the head of the hawza of Najaf an "Arab marja'," especially after the death of Ayatollah al-Khu'i. We also analyzed how the events from the late 1970s created a series of grievances in a specific section of the Iraqi population.

In this context of historical opportunity, convergence of interests between Sadr and the Regime, and convergence between the Iraqis' "demands" and Sadr's "answers," we see the beginning of the spread of Sadr's marja'iyya, with the opening of his office in Najaf, the re-opening of religious schools, and recruiting of students. We have seen how these developments were the fruit of the aforementioned regional and historical conditions, of Sadr's charisma and his will and possibility to engage with the public more than other maraja', and also some institutional support, like economic help to open the office, support the schools, keep hawza students from military draft and control of visa for foreign hawza students. As we have seen, the Regime used economic support toward different figures in the hawza to make them dependent on the government and, thus, controllable.

Using these different resources, both personal and institutional, Sadr used them to increase his standing in the hawza, marginalizing his challengers to the marja'iyya; recruited a large number of students and made them his *wukala'*; they spread throughout Iraq, opened offices as Sadr's agents, and started holding lessons on Islam, religious celebrations, and spreading Islamic values. They could do so, also in this case, exploiting some institutional support, mainly the fact that the Regime allowed them to or looked the other way, differently from what it did with agents of other maraja'. Furthermore, spreading the following of an Arab marja' and religiosity in Iraq in the 1990s, especially without many political references or attacks on the Regime in this period, was aligned with the government's interests. The fact that what Sadr and his agents were doing in this first period was aligned with the Regime's interests is also demonstrated by the lack of severe repression of Sadrist from 1992 to 1997.

We have then analyzed the beginning of the Friday prayers in October 1997. By exploring Regime's reports on the beginning of this phenomenon we could notice that these reports are almost contradictory. On the one hand, in 1997, seemed surprised by the emergence of such a movement, pointing to the fact that maybe the Regime allowed a certain amount of institutional support to Sadr in the early 1990s, especially in his attempt to control

the hawza (opening the office, re-opening the religious schools, and attracting new Iraqi students), but had looked away, probably even overlooked, the rest of Sadr's activities leading to the build-up of a social movement and not just a religious following. This undetected expansion was probably possible thanks to the very informal nature of the Sadrist network, based on personal relationships and the cover provided by the normal activities of a marja's network. Also, in this period, the Regime's reports started to notice how al-Huda was published illegally, how the Sadrists organized an Art Festival without permission from the government, and the same happened with recordings of the prayers. On the other hand, we see that when this phenomenon was detected, the Regime deployed all its surveillance capabilities, extensively mapping mosques and names of preachers leading the Friday prayers, keeping the network under strict observation.

The fact that Ba'ath commands were surprised by the start of Friday prayers, remarked on the illegality of al-Huda and other Sadrist initiatives, and had such a vague idea of who Muhammad al-Sadr was still in 1997 that they had to ask for basic information about him, such as his full name and home address, shows that probably there was not any direct agreement between the Regime and Sadr, but more likely some vague orders to let him and his agents be. The fact that these reports remarked how many of Sadr's activities were carried out without permission points to the Regime overlooking many of the Sadrists actions, even more than allowing them.

Finally, the observations in these reports suggesting to observe this phenomenon and see if it could be exploited to further the Regime's interests prove the fact that, in that period, the Ba'ath was more than keen to use religious movements to support his own stance. This confirms the idea that in the early 1990s, the Regime lent Sadr some institutional help and allowed him and his followers more space for maneuver, but without a more structured and close form of cooperation.

The Iraqi Regime considered the possibility of exploiting the Friday prayers phenomenon also because for almost the whole first year of prayers, religious topics and safe political topics, such as attacks on the US, UK, and Israel, were the main themes of the sermons and unsafe political issues and attacks on the Ba'ath were avoided. Nevertheless, Saddam's name was never mentioned in the sermons, and there were some veiled references made using Islamic history to the oppressive nature of the Ba'ath in Iraq. On some other topics, Sadr and his agents decided to stay silent, also drawing attention and critiques from the Ba'ath agents surveilling the prayers.

However, this delicate equilibrium lasted until the Summer of 1998, when Sadr, probably for complying with the Regime's orders to ban a march to Karbala for the *Arabin* pilgrimage of 1998, started losing followers. In response, Sadr and his agents were almost forced to step up criticism of the Regime as soon as mid-August 1998 to regain followers and credibility as opponents. They intensified the criticism during the Fall while also continuing to harshly criticize other clerics to strengthen his position in the hawza.

The reaction to this open criticism of the Regime came quickly. Between October 1998 and January 1999, many of Sadr's agents were arrested, Sadrist mosques were closed down, and prayers were interrupted without the Sadrists could do much about it. This situation shows the imbalance of forces and that what the Sadrists had done before were "conquests" permitted or, at best, not discovered by the Regime.

Interestingly, we see how, even in these circumstances, the Regime makes a last attempt at mediation, preferring to use the movement instead of cracking down on it. This again shows the Regime's willingness to use religious movements in their favor in this period, corroborating the idea that Sadristism could grow in the 1990s thanks to the general conditions in Iraq and not to the Regime's weakness and the strength of the movement.

Finally, as an answer to the failed mediation and the calls to revolt by Sadr, the Regime assassinates him along with two of his sons. The preparation of security forces and Army forces even before February 19th to contrast a previewed revolt confirmed the Regime's responsibility for Sadr's assassination.

After Sadr's assassination, we have looked at the Sadrists' revolts in all their different phases and components. In particular, we have analyzed how the Sadrist movement could continue after Sadr's death and under the Regime's repression and in which forms. Then, we have tried to explore the different currents within the movement and the claims to Sadr's legacy.

Muqtada, even though in this period from 1999 to 2003, could not play a central role in the fight against the Regime, clearly inherited his father's charisma and benefited from Sadr's reputation after being killed by the Regime, as facts the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq will show. Muqtada did not entirely inherit the Sadrist network, as the Regime's repression destroyed much, but interpersonal and informal relationships remained, and, most of all, an idea of what was represented by the Sadr family remained, a political and symbolical power ready to be used.

The details allowed us to overcome the simple division of the movement's history as a Regime's collaborator or as a Regime's opponent, showing how the relationship between the Sadrist phenomenon and the Ba'ath Regime was much more complicated and blurred.

On the one hand, we already explored how many of the works supporting the thesis of direct cooperation between the movement and the Regime often do not bring any source to corroborate their statements. Hasan bases his analysis on a report from Taher al-Habbous (Ṭāhir al-Ḥabbūš) (1950 –), the director of the General Security Service in Iraq between 1997 and 1999, on the good relationship between the Regime and Sadr, but the report is written clearly after 2000, even if it does not have a precise date, thus making it very difficult to consider it as a “proof” of this relationship, as Sadr had already been killed and the fight for his legacy had already started, including also the Ba'ath, who tried to pin the murder on an Iranian-Israeli-US conspiracy, as we have seen.¹²⁸⁶ Hasan also states that the Regime supported Sadr's takeover of religious schools in Najaf and the publishing of al-Huda. Looking at these statements using Regime's sources and interviews, we know there was some support in the first case, and in the second case, al-Huda was published illegally. Looking at the two sources we mentioned together, the attitude of the Regime toward the Sadrist movement could be summarized as “non-interference,” at least until mid-summer 1998. Again, for instance, Baram states that Saddam “allowed” Sadr to introduce the Friday prayers in 1997,¹²⁸⁷ Regime's reports show the surprise in front of this new phenomenon, contradicting this theory.

At the other end of the spectrum, Abbas Kadhim supports the theory of a Sadrist movement always in opposition to the Iraqi Regime, basing its statements on the fact that there is no proof of a collaboration between the two in the Ba'ath Archive and the reports remarking on the illegality of al-Huda and the lack of authorization of the Friday prayers.¹²⁸⁸ In the first case, as we highlighted in the introduction, the Ba'ath Archive is exceptionally vast, not well organized, and most of it is actually not accessible; thus, finding definitive proof of something in such an archive is extremely difficult. In the second case, remarks on the lack of authorization for al-Huda and the Friday prayers come at a particular stage of the movement's history, late 1998, when the clash with the Iraqi Regime had become open.

¹²⁸⁶ <https://tinyurl.com/y3mhsz8r>. Furthermore, the website is a pro-Ba'ath one, so also the source's objectivity should be questioned.

¹²⁸⁷ Baram (2010). *Sadr the Father, Sadr the Son*, p. 144.

¹²⁸⁸ Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza under Siege*.

Finally, using also the interviews, it becomes evident that even Sadrists are aware of the fact that the Regime let them do certain things at the beginning of the 1990s.¹²⁸⁹

Considering all this and the movement's history for how we could retrace it, we can say that the Sadrist movement developed at the beginning of the 1990s due to the conditions we highlighted and thanks to Sadr's pragmatism. In this sense, Sadr accepted the Regime's little amount of institutional support to build his claim to the marja'iyya and sideline his concurrence in the hawza while exploiting the Regime's looking the other way to use his network as a marja' to build a social and religious movement. This did not worry particularly the Regime as they had similar interests and also mostly escaped the Regime's surveillance. This situation of support, allowing certain liberties and being unperceived, lasted until October 1997. At this point, the Regime learned the extent of the movement but still left it some liberty of maneuver. Finally, the relationship shifted to an open clash at the end of the Summer of 1998, leading to Sadr's assassination a few months later. Thus, we could use the terms "allowing," "supporting," and "unperceiving" to describe the relationship between the Sadrist movement and the Iraqi Regime until 1997, giving an example of how this movement in this period worked as a kind of tolerated opposition. Then, "letting them do" would be more appropriate to describe the situation until the end of the Summer of 1998, still symbolizing a kind of tolerated opposition. Finally, the "open rebellion" phase started in the Fall of 1998 and lasted until the Regime fell.

Within this structure, allowed by the historical conditions and, as we have said, by Sadr's pragmatism – learned the hard way through different waves of repressions of the Islamist movement and based on the correct evaluation of the imbalance of forces – ¹²⁹⁰ all the polysemic expressions of the Sadrist movement took shape; the criticism of the silent hawza and the proposal of a new model; the focus on millenarism; the answer to the needs of the medium-lower strata of Iraqi population; the dialogue with Iraqi tribes, and other aspects explored in this work.

The importance of the study of Sadrism, apart from reconstructing an essential part of Iraqi contemporary history, also resides in its exemplarity as an opposition movement created and developed under an authoritarian regime, making compromises with the Regime

¹²⁸⁹ The Sadrists also support the theory that the Regime was too weak to stop them. Nevertheless, this is more a narrative of the Sadrist movement on itself to depict itself always as an opposer of the Regime, and it is disproved by the events of 1999. While Sadrist would not have any reason to lie about the fact that the Regime let them do certain things at the beginning of the 1990s.

¹²⁹⁰ Sadr defined the situation as: *the Regime supports and sponsors Shiite religious manifestations, and it is sympathetic to us as long as we do not interfere in politics*. Kadhim (2013). *The Hawza under Siege*, p. 43.

and exploiting this position against its adversaries – such as other religious forces in the hawza, like the al-Hakim family. It is thus the story of a movement that is not the fiery opponent that sometimes is described, but much more a pragmatic opponent that was perfectly at ease with a veiled criticism of the Regime and was forced into a more open confrontation by the events we described.

Nevertheless, it is the history of a movement that was able to build a basis for a powerful political and social force emerging after the fall of the Ba'ath Regime and that participated and shared in the processes of the 1990s that built part of the basis for what happened after the US-led invasion of Iraq of 2003.

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Annexes.

Annex 1: Documents.

At the end of this work, we decided to include some of the internal movement documents, some Ba'ath documents that we could examine in Iraq, and some newspaper articles on Sadr from Iraqi and Lebanese newspapers from the 1990s. The first kind of documents are precious examples of a sort of administration internal to the movement, as we could examine in the second chapter, and are not discussed in any of the work on the Sadrist history in the 1990s in Western languages; we find some examples in works in Arabic but without a proper analysis of these documents. The second kind of document is interesting in that it shows some examples of the papers we could examine in the Ba'ath party archive and provides information on the movement from the Regime's perspective. Finally, newspapers help us contextualize the movement's development in the history of the 1990s.



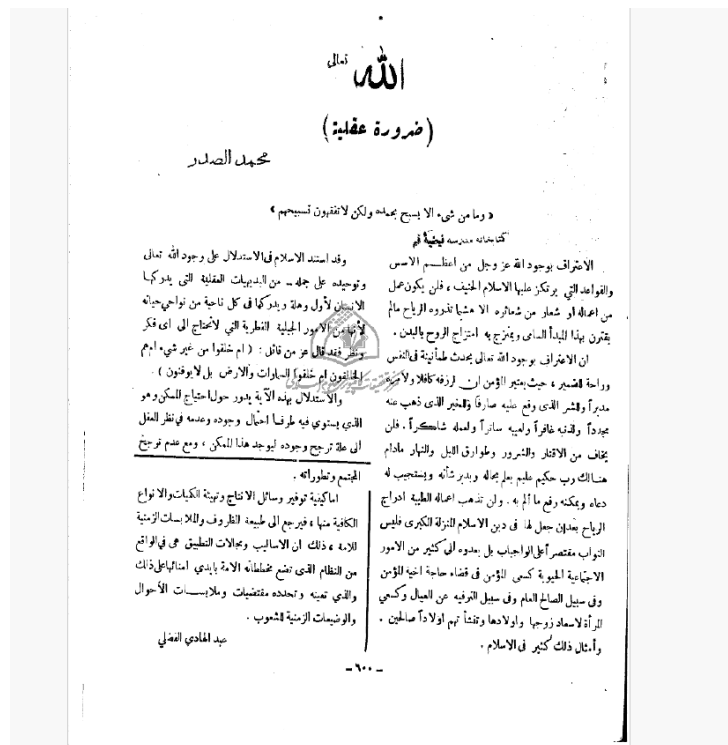
Document n. 1 - al-Thawrah article quoting al-Sadr condemnation of the 1991 Uprising. Source: Dar al-Wathaiq.



Document n. 2 - Article quoting al-Sadr condemnation of the 1991 Uprising. 18/03/1991. Source: https://iraqoverredline.blogspot.com/2019/11/blog-post_94.html.



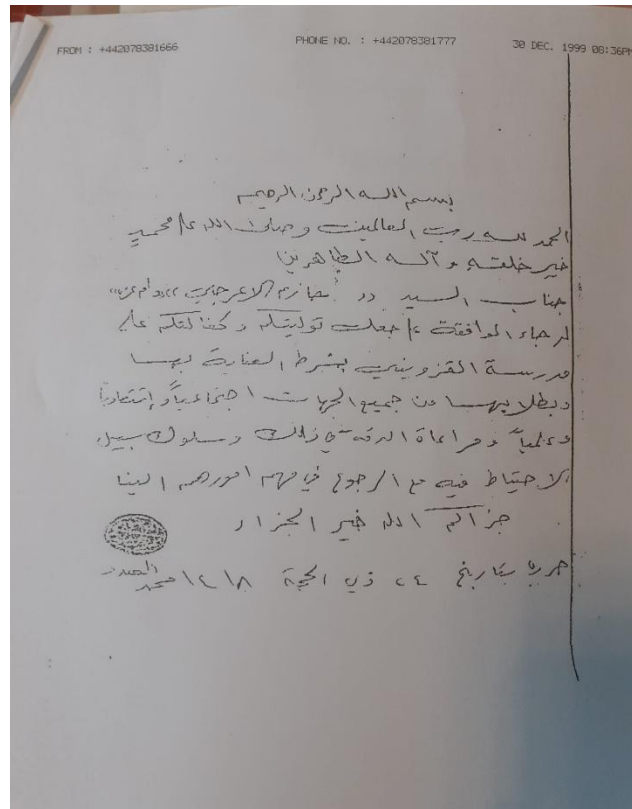
Document n. 3 – The magazine Alif-Ba using the Regime's official definition of the 1991 Uprising “*Ṣaḥḥah al-ḥiyānah wa al-ḡadr*.” Source: *Dār al-Kutub wa al-Waṭā'iq* (National Library and Archives) – Baghdad.



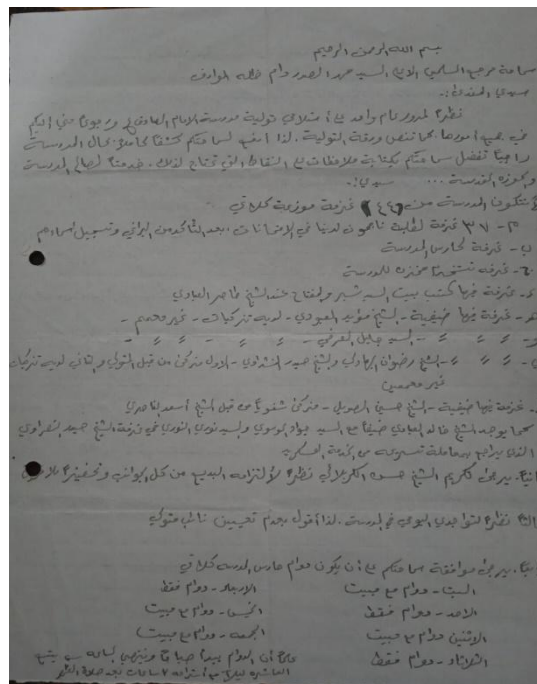
Document n. 4 – Sadr's article in the magazine *Al-Adwa al-Islamiyyah*, year 1, n. 23, 24 (16 May 1961). Title: "God. A Necessary Mentality." Source: *Dār al-Kutub wa al-Waṭā'iq* (National Library and Archives) – Baghdad.



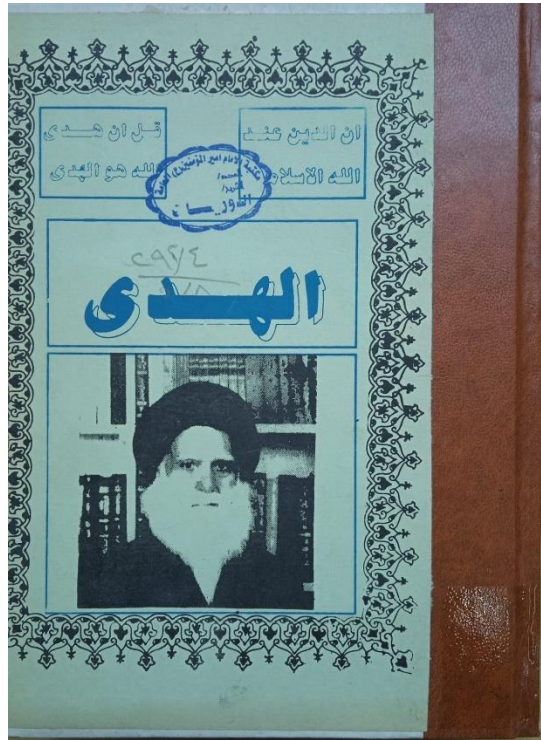
Document n. 5 – *al-Adwa al-Islamiyya* cover, year 2, n. 2. Source: *Dār al-Kutub wa al-Waṭā'iq* (National Library and Archives) – Baghdad.



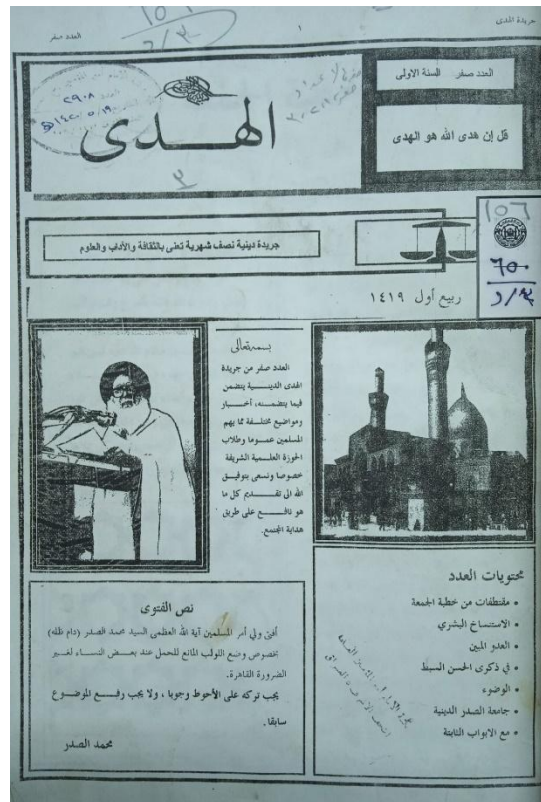
Document n. 6 - Tawali certificate from Sadr to Sayyid A.. Source: Sayyid A..



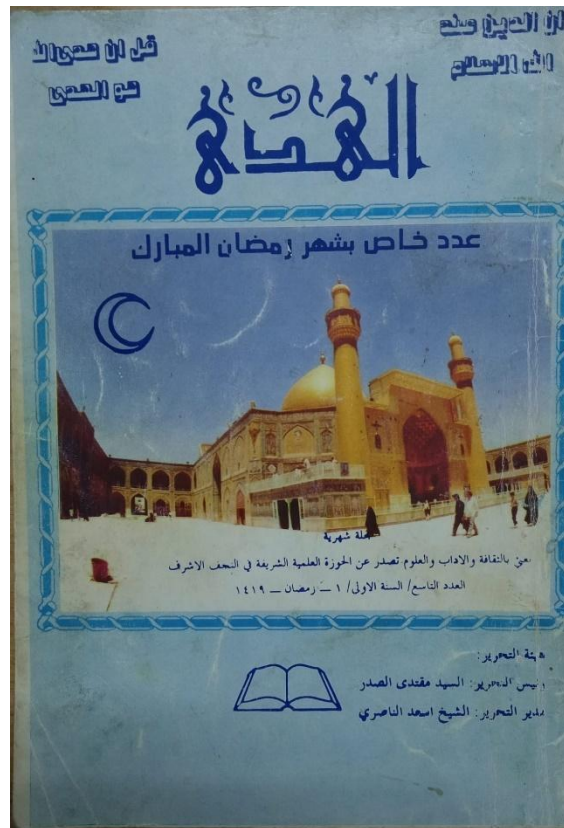
Document n. 7 - Communication between the mutawalli of the Imam Sadiq school, Sheikh G., and Sadr concerning the administration of the school. Source: Sheikh G..



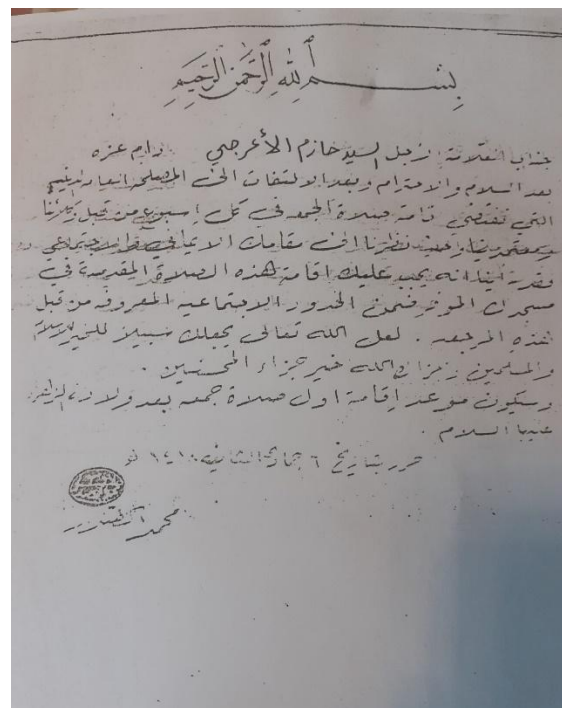
Document n. 10 – Cover of al-Huda magazine. Source: Maktabah al-Imām Amīr al-Mu'minīn.



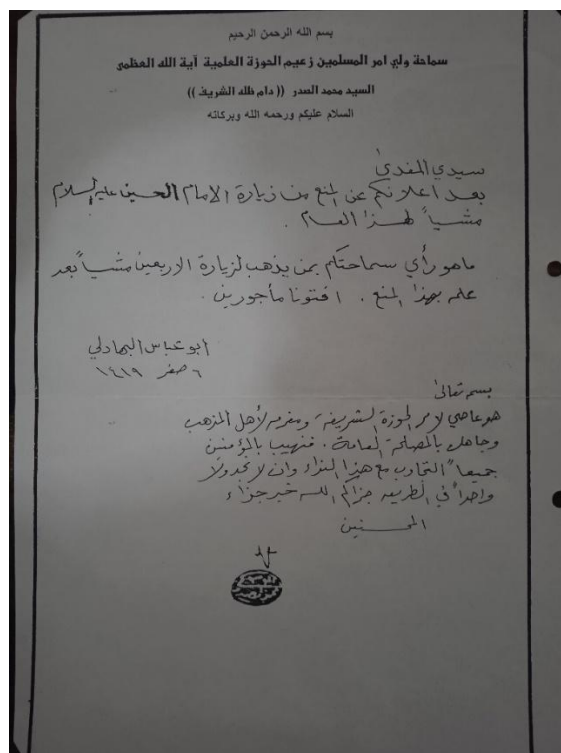
Document n. 11 – Cover of al-Huda magazine, June 1998. Source: Maktabah al-Imām Amīr al-Mu'minīn.



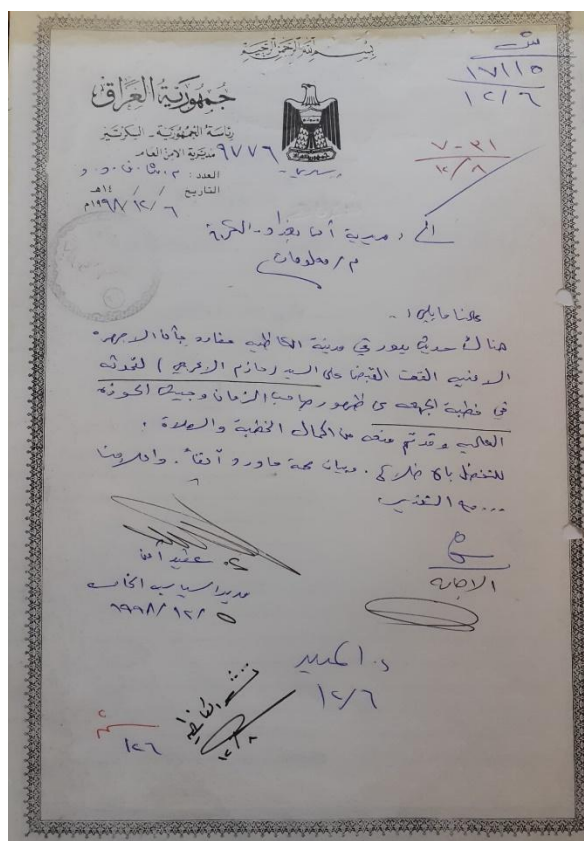
Document n. 12 – al-Huda magazine cover, December 1998. Source: Maktabah al-Imām Amīr al-Mu'minīn.



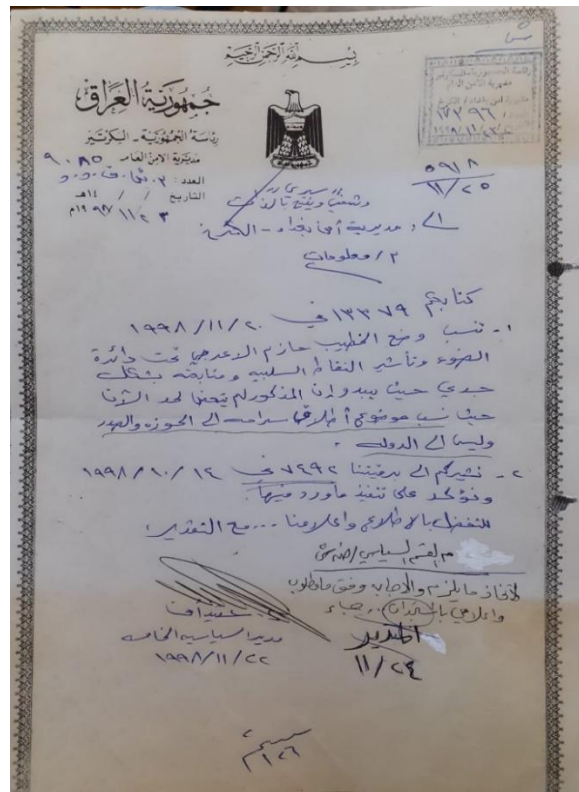
Document n. 13 - Order from Sadr to start the prayer to Sayyid A. in October 1997/Jumada al-thani/al-akhir 1418 h. Source: Sayyid A..



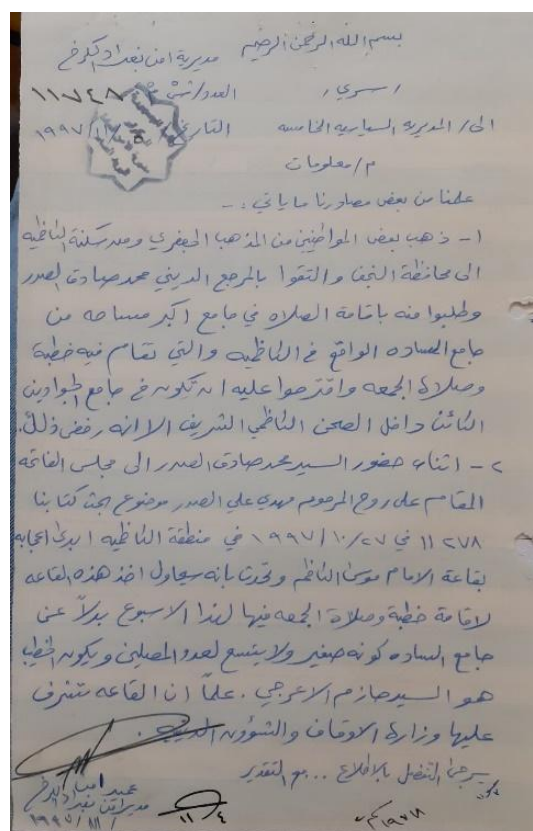
Document n. 20 – Istifta' and Sadr's fatwa concerning the possibility of going to the pilgrimage of Arabin after Sadr had banned it. June 2, 1998/ 6 Safar 1419 h. Source: Sheikh G..



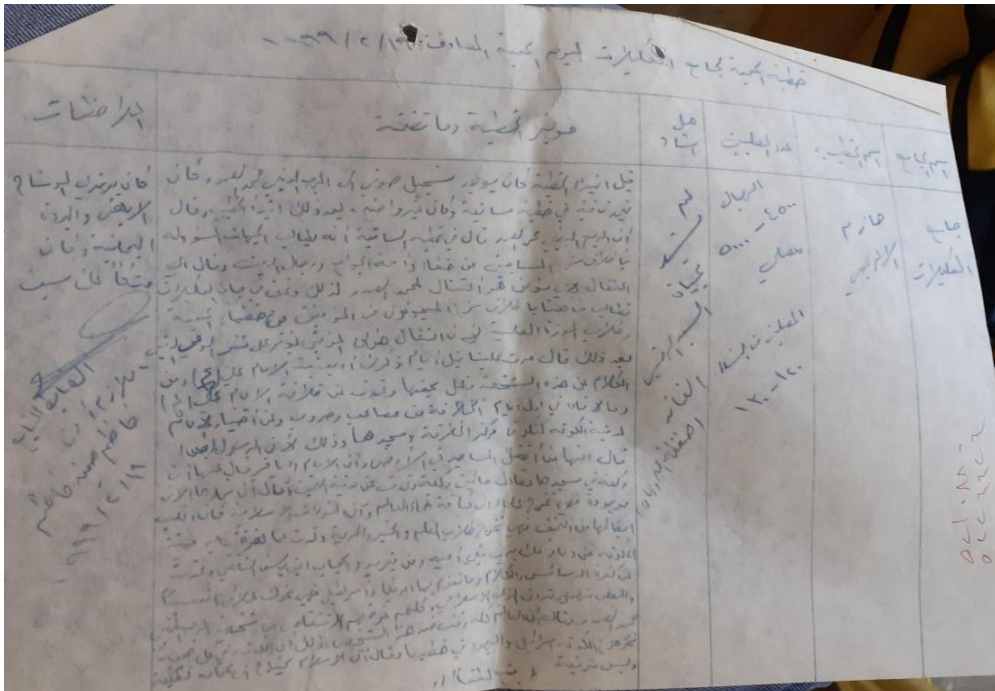
Document n. 21 – Report on the arrest of Sayyid A., December 6, 1998. Source: Sayyid A..



Document n. 22 – Report on Sayyid A.'s sermon of November 20, 1998. He attacks the Iraqi state, supporting instead the dominion of the hawza. Source Sayyid A..



Document n. 23 – Regime's report on how Kadhimiyah's mosque is too small and can not be used. November 1998. Source: Sayyid A..



Document n. 24 – Report on Sayyid A. on February 2, 1999. Source: Sayyid A..

Monday February 22, 1999

AS.SAFIR

السفير 16
 الإثنين ٢٢ شباط ١٩٩٩ - العدد ٨٣٠

الأردن: تغييرات في قيادة الجيش

المعارضة تطالب بانتخاب رئيس الوزراء بالإقتراع المباشر

تجولت في الجيش في قيادة الجيش... المعارضة تطالب بانتخاب رئيس الوزراء بالإقتراع المباشر... (The text continues with details of military changes and public opposition demands for direct election of the Prime Minister.)

٢٠ قتيلًا في احتجاجات شيعية في العراق

بغداد: مؤامرة أجنبية وراء اغتيال الصدر

إيران والمعارضة: السلطات العراقية مسؤولة عن الجريمة

بغداد: مؤامرة أجنبية وراء اغتيال الصدر... (The text reports on the assassination of a prominent figure in Iraq, attributing it to a foreign plot and criticizing the Iraqi government.)

الرئيس السوداني مستعد للتخلي عن الجنوب

الرئيس السوداني مستعد للتخلي عن الجنوب... (The text discusses the political situation in Sudan and the President's stance on the southern region.)

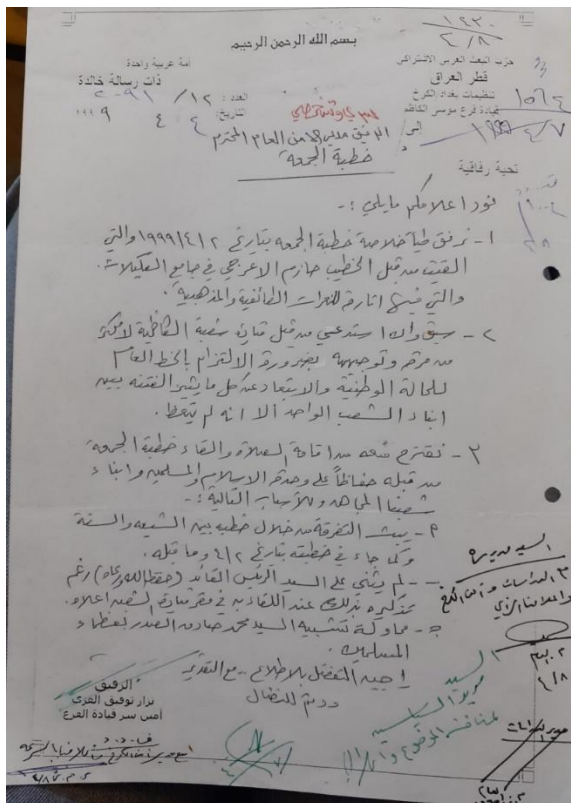
عراق: ٢٠ قتيلًا في احتجاجات شيعية في العراق

عراق: ٢٠ قتيلًا في احتجاجات شيعية في العراق... (This section continues the report on the protests and the assassination in Iraq.)

Document n. 25 – Lebanese newspaper al-Safir, February 22, 1999, with the news of Sadr's assassination. Source: Arabic Newspapers collection at the American University of Beirut (AUB).



Document n. 26 – Lebanese newspaper al-Nahr, February 22, 1999, with the news of Sadr's assassination. Source: Arabic Newspapers collection at the American University of Beirut (AUB).



Document n. 27 – Regime's report on Sayyid A. 's sermon on April 2, 1999. Source: Sayyid A..

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

إن فضيلة السيد كاظم الأعرجي حفظه الله وكيلنا في المصالح
الشرعية وقبض الحقوق من سبط الإمام وسبط السادة الزكوة
ومجهول المآلات وردود المظالم وصرف نصفها في مصارفها
الشرعية وإبصار الباقي لبننا وقبض الكفايات وصرفها
جميعاً في مصارفها الشرعية وهو مخدع لخصوص من في العراق
من يصعب عليهم الاتصال بنا في إعطاء الأوقاف الشرعية
في المصالح مع أنفسهم والصرف لمن له أهلية لذلك ويكون
الوزن في خصوص الأمور المذكورة في المال .

وإن هذا التوكيل والتخويل مسترآن إلى سنة سماوية
حين الصدور .

والسلام عليه وعلى من حضره من المؤمنين والمؤمنات .

وبركاته .

١ شعبان / ١٤٢٠ هـ

كاظم الحسيني العاملي

Document n. 30 – Wakala from Sayyid Kadhem al-HA. to Sayyid A., November 10, 1999 / Sha'aban 1, 1420. Source: Sayyid A..

شهادة التواصي

مكتب المرجع الديني
مساحة آية الله العظمى
السيد كاظم الحسيني العاملي
« دام ظلّه الوارف »

الرقم : ٧٠١
التاريخ : ٢٩ / ١٢ / ١٤٢٣

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله رب العالمين وصلى الله على سيدنا محمد وآله الطاهرين
والسلام على أنبياء الله المرسلين وعلقتهم المقربين وعباده الصالحين وبعد :-
أي من أعظم نعم الله علينا تشریفنا بالانتماء لاهل البيت عليه السلام
روحاً ومعنئاً وكانوا ولازلوا صلوات الله عليهم منقولاً عن بابائنا من
وآلهم في طهرنا الروحي والثقافي والديني ونحمد الله على ذلك ونشكره ولا
نؤذي الواجب من شكره .

وتفضل علينا اهل البيت عليهم السلام - فأختاروا بعض النعم من نزل
لنا أضرحة لهم فزاد ذلك في مسرة ولبنا في إيمانهم بالله وتأييده - السلام
وامتازت مدينة الكاظمية بكونها مخصصة للامام من الهمام في العالم والجار عليهم السلام -
فأردنا المدينة بغير حرجنا وأصبحنا جميع السبعة بآيين الجوارح وسامعين لآدبها .
وجب على المؤمنين عرفان الحق وتقدير هذه النعمة ولا يتم ذلك إلا بالتوجه إلى الله
للصبر على الشرف وللهذا نصبناء ولنا المهدون العلامة السيد كاظم الأعرجي متولياً سريعاً
لخدمة الصالحين الشريفين وكذلك نصبناء ولنا المجتهد الشيخ محمد حسين بن الشيخ فاضل الكليدار
سابقاً لخدمة الصالحين الشريفين والعقلاء بها للزم لذلك وفقها الله لهذه المهمة
واجباً على المؤمنين أعانتهم على ذلك . والسلام عليهم وعلى جميع عباد الله الصالحين
في الناس والعرضين من شرفهم وجاهدوا في الدين

شهادة التواصي
مساحة آية الله العظمى
السيد كاظم الحسيني العاملي
« دام ظلّه الوارف »

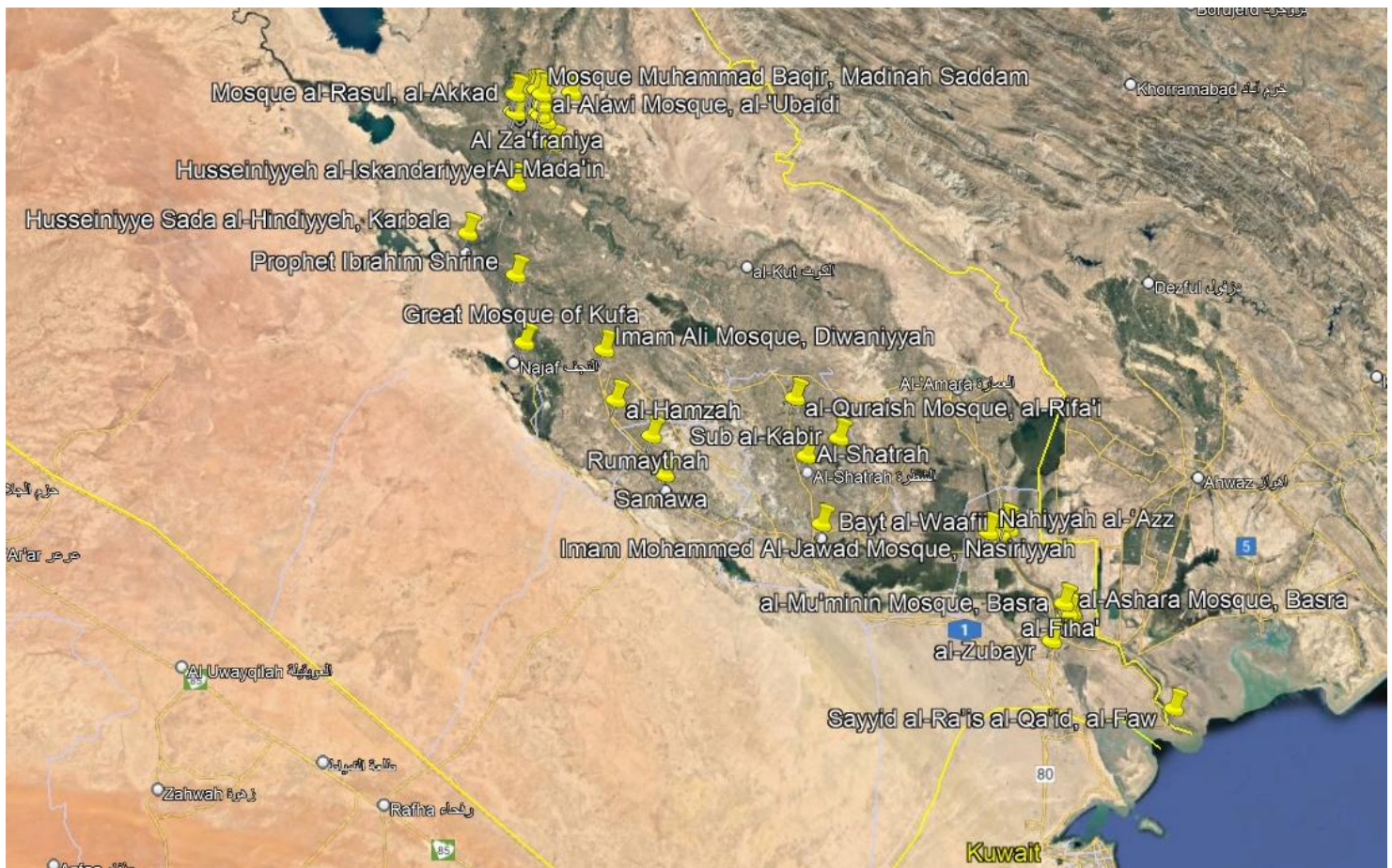
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العراق - النجف الاشرف

Document n. 31 – Tawalli certificate from Sayyid Kadhem al-Haeri to Sayyid A., 2003. Source: Sayyid A..

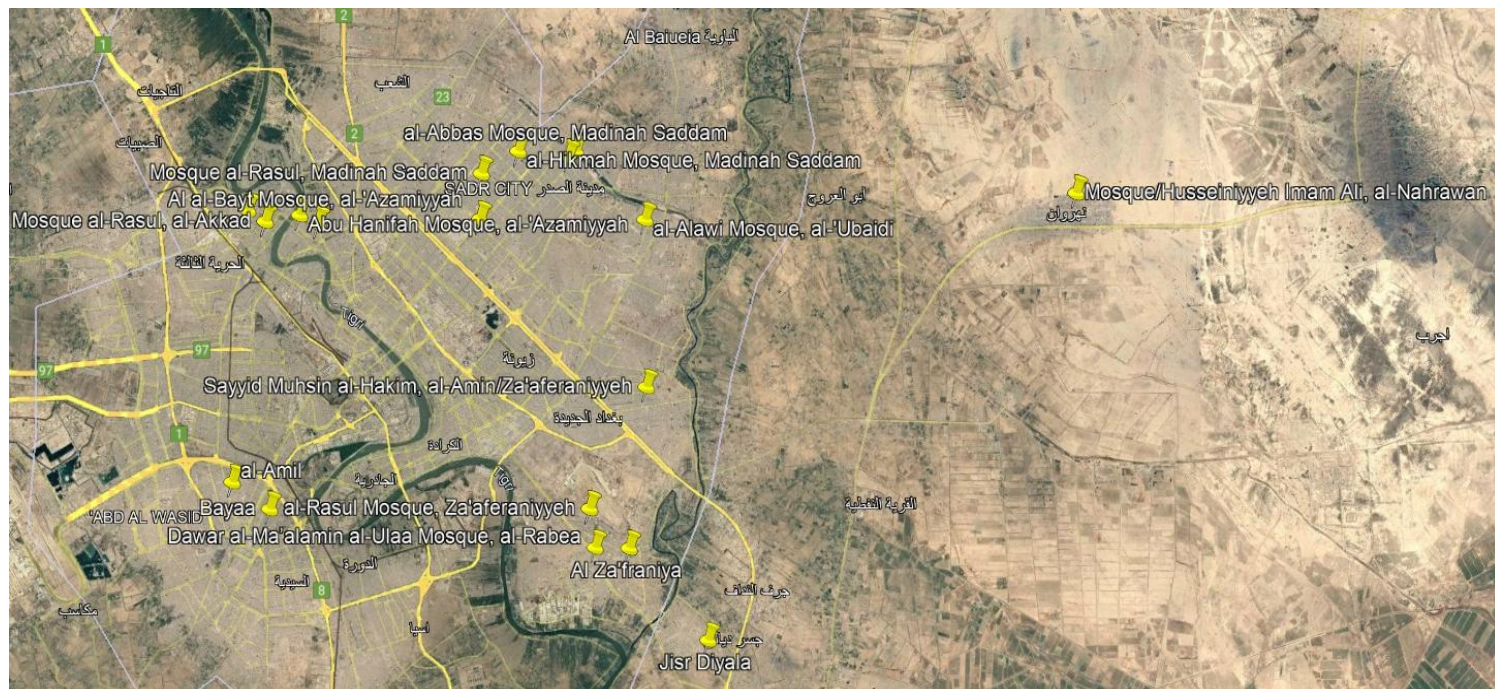
Annex 3: Maps.

We also decided to include some maps showing the positions of the Mosques and Hussainiyyahs where the prayer took place. We also marked neighborhoods often quoted in the reports as of interest for the Sadrists, either as the place where worshipers were coming from or where the movement's activities took place. In some cases, the mosque's location is stated in the Ba'ath reports; in other cases, it is evident from the Ba'ath section that reports events. In other cases, we gave an approximate location, as we could not find the mosque's site for sure, as names might have changed from the 1990s, mosques might have closed down, or other circumstances could have occurred. Nevertheless, these maps help us visualize at least a partial geographical expansion of Sadrism in Iraq.¹²⁹¹



Map n. 1: The Sadrist Movement Expansion in Iraq.

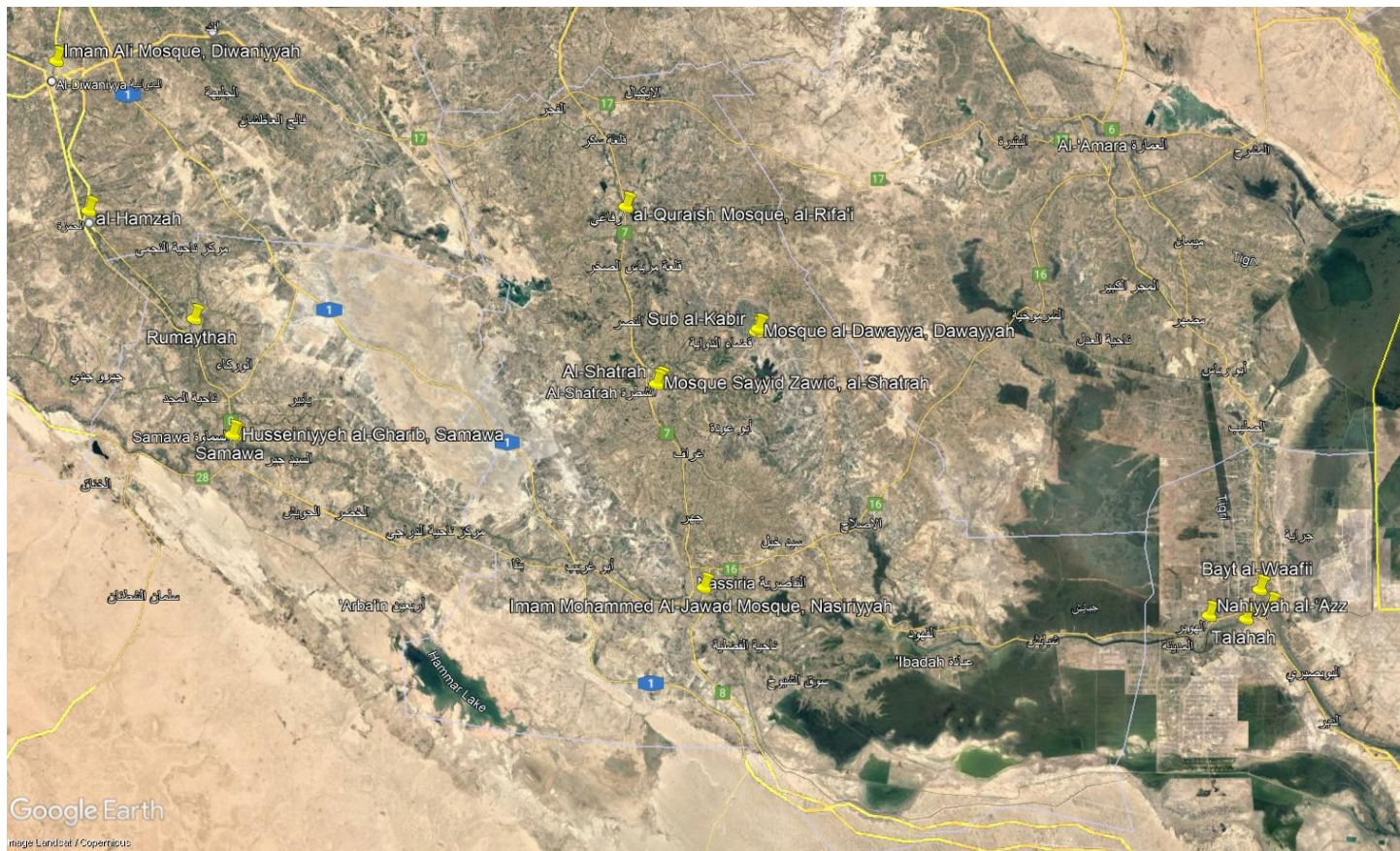
¹²⁹¹ For an interactive and more accurate mapping of the Sadrist expansion in Iraq in the 1990s, the Mosques' locations file can be downloaded from this Google Drive link and used on Google Earth: https://earth.google.com/earth/d/1hFMpR5wZzCjJh53F7e_iKV9XmzUfSLOm?usp=sharing.



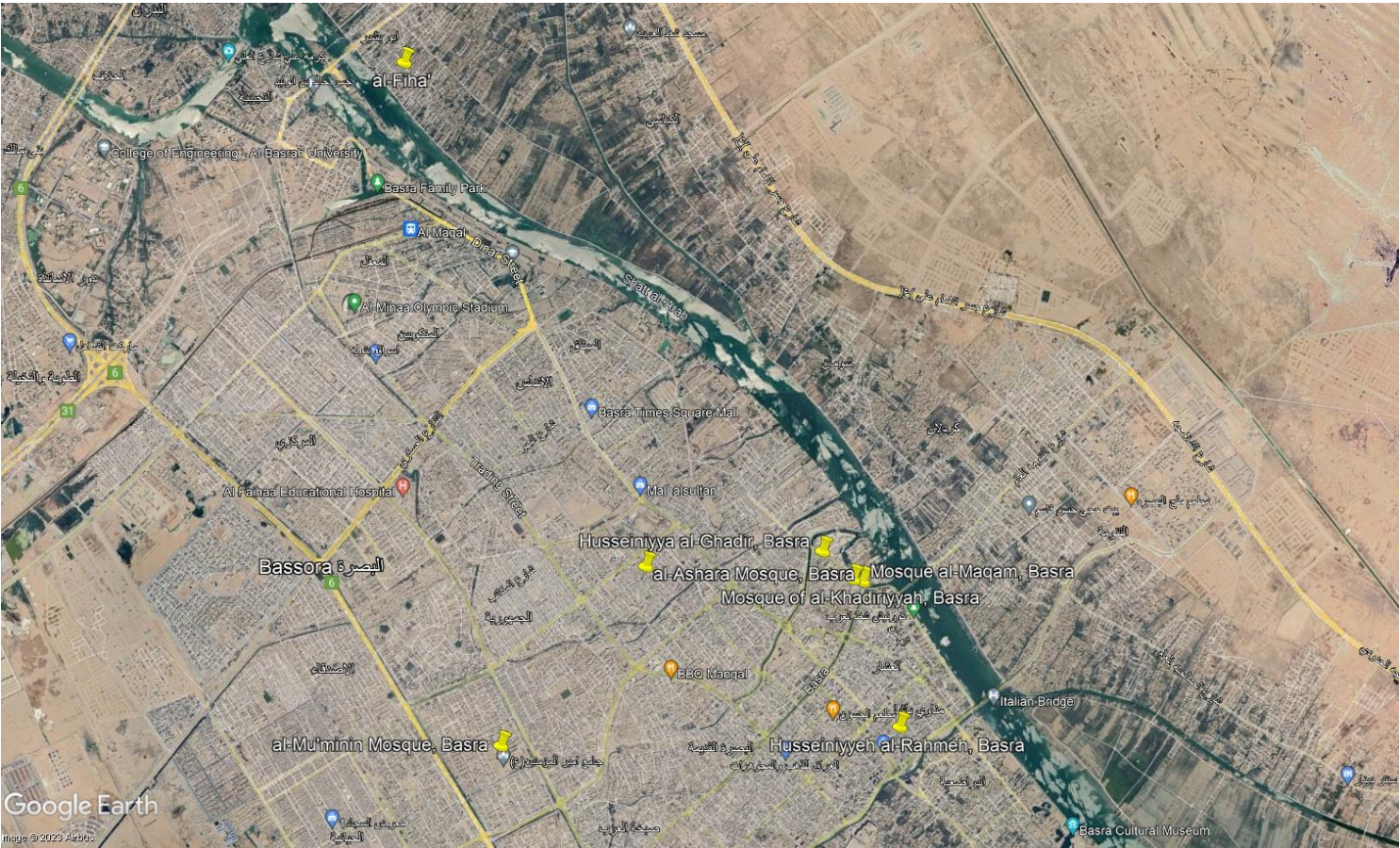
Map n. 2: The Sadrist Movement in the Baghdad Area.



Map n. 3: The Sadrist Movement in Central Iraq.



Map n. 4: The Sadrist Movement in Central-Southern Iraq.



Map n. 5: The Sadrist Movement in Basra.



Map. n. 6: The Sadrist Movement in Southern Iraq.

Table 2: Movement's Organizational Chart.

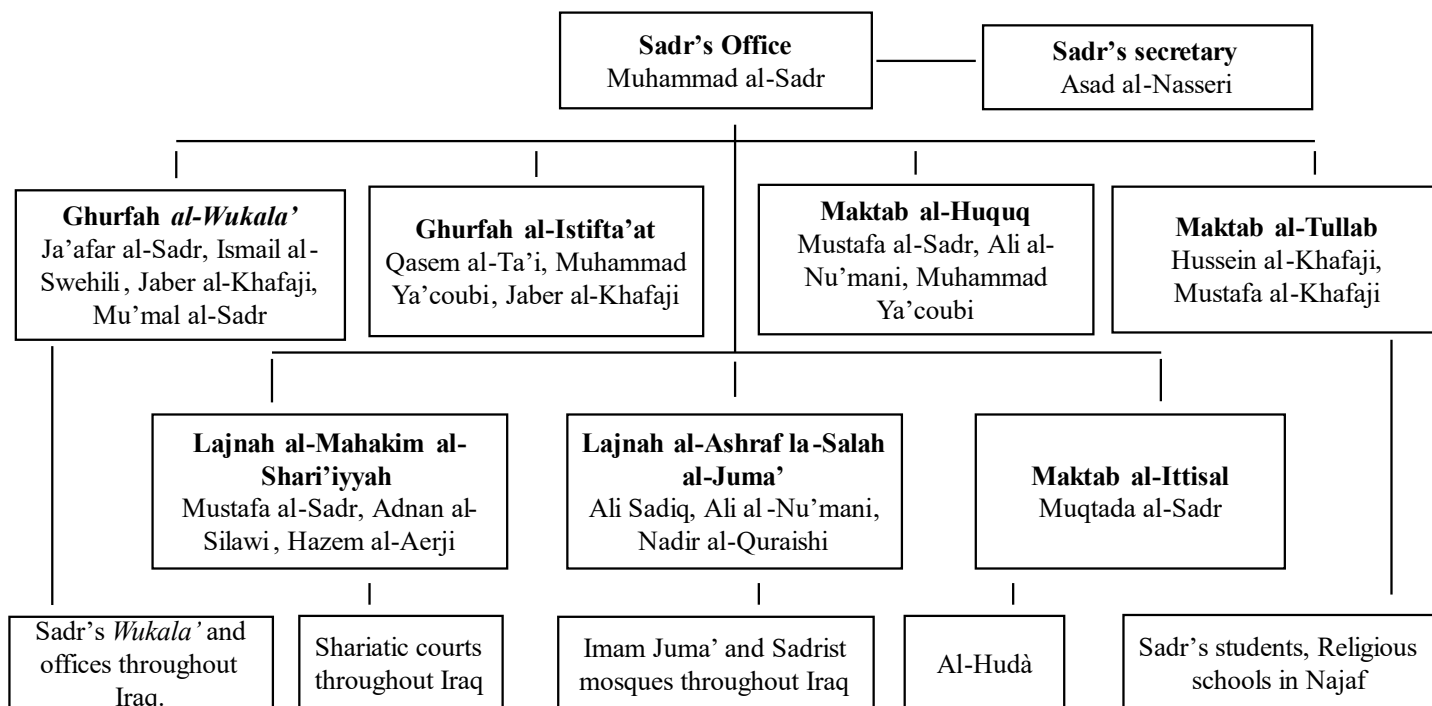


Table 3: Prayers.

The following Tables provide an analytic list of all Friday Prayer gatherings reported by the Ba'ath Party in the Archive. When shown in the report, we give the mosque's name and a specific area. We then provide a partial calendar of the gatherings, again based on what we found in the Ba'ath Archive. When mentioned, we specify the preacher's name and the number of worshipers. When these two pieces of information are missing, but we know a Prayer occurred, we just use "X" to indicate the event. We thought these tables might help visualize the duration and number of the prayers.

	Numbers of worshipers and name of the preacher				
Name of the Mosque	al-Rasūl Mosque (Akkad Area)	al-Muḥsin Mosque (Madinah Saddam)	Muḥammad Bāqir Mosque (Madinah Saddam)	al-Rasūl Mosque (Madinah Saddam)	
October 24, 1997		11.000 worshipers	6.000 worshipers		
October 31, 1997		30.000 worshipers			
November 7, 1997		X		4.000 worshipers	
November 21, 1997		5.000 worshipers			
November 28, 1997	5.500 Šeiḥ ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Zāmil al-Sā‘dī	25.000 Sayyid ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Šūkī			
December 5, 1997		X		X	
December 12, 1997					
December 19, 1997	6.500 Šeiḥ ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Zāmil al-Sā‘dī	20.000 Sayyid Hādī Ḥarḥ Falaḥī al-Mūsawī (in lieu of Sayyid ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Šūkī)			

Table 1, October – December 1997.

	Numbers of worshipers and name of the preacher				
Name of the Mosque	Husseiniyyeh Muḥsin al-Ḥakīm (Za‘aferāniyyah area/al-Amīn)	Dawwar al-Ma‘alamīn al-Ūlā (al-Rabī‘ area)	Husseiniyyeh of the Mosque Sadah al-Hindiyyeh (Karbala)	Husseiniyyeh al-Iskandariyyah (al-Iskandariyyah)	al-Rasūl Mosque (Za‘aferāniyyah area)
August 14, 1998	‘Alī al-Ka‘abī				
August, 28, 1998	Šeiḥ Aḥmad al-Maṭīrī/ ‘Alī al-Ka‘abī	‘Abd al-Mālīk ‘Abd al-Raḥmān/ Šeiḥ Aḥmad Šaqīq			
September 4, 1998	Šeiḥ Aḥmad al-Maṭīrī	‘Abd al-Mālīk ‘Abd al-Raḥmān/ Šeiḥ Aḥmad Šaqīq / Sayyid Farağ al-Šamarī			
September 18, 1998	Šeiḥ Aḥmad al-Maṭīrī				
September 25, 1998	Bašīr al-Mūsawī				
November 27, 1998			Sayyid ‘Adnān al-Qazwīnī	‘Abd al-Riḍā al-Duwāhī, 600 worhsipers	
December 11, 1998					X
December 18, 1998					X
December 25, 1998	‘Alī al-Ka‘abī, 10,000 worshipers				X

Table 2, August – December 1998.

	Numbers of worshipers and name of the preacher				
Name of the Mosque	Mosque of Imam ‘Alī (al-Madā’in)	Great Mosque of Kufa (Kufa)	Sa‘īdah wa al-‘Alī al-Aẓīm Mosque (al-Za‘aferāniyya h area)	al-Rašāīd Mosque	
August 14, 1998					
August, 28, 1998					
September 4, 1998					
September 18, 1998					
September 25, 1998					
November 27, 1998				X	
December 11, 1998	200 people		X		
December 18, 1998		Muhammad al-Sadr, 8,000 people			
December 25, 1998	Hayṭam ‘Akalah Ḥalabūs al-Zaydī, 1000 worshipers	Muhammad al-Sadr			

Table 2.1, August – December 1998.

	Numbers of worshipers and name of the preacher				
Name of the Mosque	al-Muḥsin Mosque (Za‘aferāniyyah area/al-Amīn)	al-‘Akīlāt Mosque (Kāḍimiyyah area)	Mosque in the Ḍi Qār Province	Sayyid al-Zawīd (in Šaṭrah)	Great Mosque of al-Šaṭrah
January 1, 1999	‘Alī al-Ka‘abī, 16,000 worshipers	Sayyid Ḥāzim al-‘Arġī			
January 8, 1999	‘Alī al-Ka‘abī		Šeiḥ Muḥammad Muḥsin al-Ḥafaġī, 2000 worshipers	Šeiḥ ‘Alī al-Sahlānī	Šeiḥ ‘Alī Nāsir Maṭlak al-Zahīrī
January 15, 1999	‘Alī al-Ka‘abī, 20,000 worshipers			Šeiḥ ‘Alī al-Sahlānī	Šeiḥ ‘Alī Nāsir Maṭlak al-Zahīrī
January 22, 1999	‘Alī al-Ka‘abī, 20,000 worshipers			Šeiḥ Mītam Sa‘ad al-‘Alāq	X
January 29, 1999	‘Alī al-Ka‘abī, 20,000 worshipers			Šeiḥ ‘Alī al-Sahlānī	Ra‘id al-Ḥammūdī al-Naġdī
February 5, 1999	Šeiḥ Bašīr al-Ġaza‘irī, 30,000 worshipers				
February 12, 1999	Šeiḥ Bašīr al-Ġaza‘irī, 15,000 worshipers				
February 19, 1999	‘Alī al-Ka‘abī	Sayyid Ḥāzim al-‘Arġī			

Table 3, January – February 1999

Name of the Mosque	Numbers of worshipers and name of the preacher				
	al-Muḥsin Mosque (al-Ġarāf area)	Mosque Qurayš (al-Rifā'ī)	al-Rasūl Mosque (Za'āferāniyyah area)	Mosque of Imam Muḥammad al-Ġawādīn (Nāṣiriyya)	Husseiniyyeh Imam 'Alī (al-Nahrawān)
January 1, 1999					
January 8, 1999	Šeiḥ Mīṭam Sa'ad al-'Alāq				
January 15, 1999		Šeiḥ Ḥaydar al-Ġazī		X	
January 22, 1999					
January 29, 1999		Šeiḥ Ḥaydar al-Ġazī			
February 5, 1999					
February 12, 1999					
February 19, 1999			X		Sayyid Raḥīm Ġawād, 100 worshipers

Table 3.1, January – February 1999

	Numbers of worshipers and name of the preacher				
Name of the Mosque	Great Mosque of Kufa (Kufa)	Husseiniyyeh in Ḥayy al-Sa‘ad	al-Maḍīnah Mosque	Husseiniyyeh of Sayyid Saḍḍām	al-‘Aṣarah Mosque (Baṣrah)
January 1, 1999					
January 8, 1999					
January 15, 1999					
January 22, 1999					
January 29, 1999	Muhammad al-Sadr	X	‘Alā’ al-Muḡbīl al-Lāmī, 450 worshipers	Sāliḥ al-Ġizānī, 600 worshipers	X
February 5, 1999	Muhammad al-Sadr				
February 12, 1999	Muhammad al-Sadr, 10,000 worshipers				
February 19, 1999	Muhammad al-Sadr				

Table 3.2, January – February 1999

	Numbers of worshipers and name of the preacher				
Name of the Mosque	Mosque of al-Ḥadīriyyah (Baṣrah)	Mosque al-Maḳām (Baṣrah)	al-Mu'minīn (Mosque (Baṣrah))	Husseiniyyah al-Ġadīr (Baṣrah)	Mosque of al-Dawāyah (al-Dawāyah)
January 1, 1999					
January 8, 1999					
January 15, 1999					
January 22, 1999					
January 29, 1999	X 120 worshipers	X 180 worshipers		Sittār Ġabār, 2000 worshipers	‘Alī Sultān
February 5, 1999					
February 12, 1999					
February 19, 1999					

Table 3.3, January – February 1999

	Numbers of worshipers and name of the preacher				
Name of the Mosque	Husseiniyye Safiḥ al-Mariyānī (al-Fāw)	Sayyid al-Ra'īs al-Qā'id (al-Fāw)	Husseiniyye al-Raḥmah (Baṣrah)		
January 1, 1999					
January 8, 1999					
January 15, 1999					
January 22, 1999					
January 29, 1999	Aḥmad al-Mālikī	X	X, 100 worshipers		
February 5, 1999					
February 12, 1999					
February 19, 1999					

Table 3.4, January – February 1999

	Numbers of worshipers and name of the preacher				
Name of the Mosque	Ahl al-Bayt Mosque (al-‘Aẓamiyyah area)	Mosque al-‘Abbas (Madinah Saddam)	Husseiniyyeh al-Ḥakīm (Za‘aferāniyyah area/al-Amīn)	Al-Ḥikmah Mosque (Madinah Saddam)	al-Ġawādīn (Nāṣiriyya)
February 19, 1999				‘Alī al-Ka‘abī	
February 26, 1999	Sayyid Bašīir ‘Abd al-Razaq al-Mūsawī, 1,300 worshipers	Salmān al-‘Alawī	Šeiḥ ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Zāmil al-Sā‘dī		
March 12, 1999			Šeiḥ Ṣalāḥ al-Ḥaz‘alī, 10,000 worshipers		Sayyid ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Ḥussaīn al-Mudāmġah
March 19, 1999				‘Alī al-Ka‘abī	
March 29, 1999				‘Alī al-Ka‘abī /Aḥmad al-Nāsir	
April 2, 1999				‘Alī al-Ka‘abī	
April 11, 1999				Šeiḥ ‘Abd al-Zahirah al-Suwaī‘dī	
April 16, 1999					

Table 4, February – April 1999

	Numbers of worshipers and name of the preacher				
Name of the Mosque	Al-‘Alawī Mosque (al-‘Ubaīdī)	Husseiniyye Imam ‘Alī (Nahrawān)	Imam ‘Alī Mosque (Diwāniyyah)	Abū Ḥanīfah Mosque (al-‘Aẓamiyyah)	Al-Rasūl Mosque (Madinah Saddam)
April 16, 1999	Šeiḥ Muḥammad Ḥussaīn al-Farḥān, 600 worshipers				
April 20, 1999		Sayyid Raḥīm Ğawād, 455 worshipers			
April 30, 1999			Salmān al-‘Alawī, 6000 worshipers		
May 7, 1999	Šeiḥ Ḥussaīn al-Mālikī al-‘Abīdī			X	
May 20, 1999		Ḥālīd Ḥarīfī Hāšim ‘Akāb al-‘Akīlī			
June 4, 1999					
July 2, 1999					
July 16, 1999					Šeiḥ Ḥālīd al-Šamarī
August 1999	Sayyid Muḥammad Faraġ al-Šamarī				

Table 5, April – August 1999

	Numbers of worshipers and name of the preacher				
Name of the Mosque	Husseiniyyah al-Muḥsin (Za‘aferāniyyah area/al-Amīn)	Husseiniyyah al-Zāhirah	14 th of Ramaḍān Mosque		
April 16, 1999					
April 20, 1999					
April 30, 1999					
May 7, 1999			X		
May 20, 1999					
June 4, 1999	Šeiḥ Muḥammad Šādiq				
July 2, 1999		Šeiḥ Aḥamad ‘Abīdī			
July 16, 1999					
August 1999					

Table 5.1, April – August 1999